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ELLERY QUEEN'S Mystery Magazine

FEBRUARY 35¢

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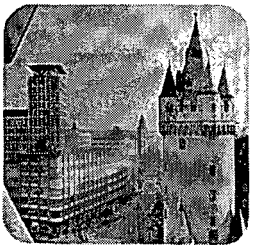

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a new story by

EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR:	**STANLEY ELLIN**
TITLE:	***Beidenbauer's Flea***
TYPE:	Crime Story
LOCALE:	New York City
TIME:	The Present
COMMENTS:	*Meet the impresario of Beidenbauer's Mighty Mites—a grand and glorious character out of the past, wandering over the face of the earth, doomed to suffer and search, search and suffer . . . an extraordinary story.*

I WAS SEATED ON A BENCH IN CENtral Park, half drowsing in the autumn sunlight, when a strange figure approached—the cadaverous figure of a man who bore himself with the grandeur of an ancient matinee idol. As he walked, he swung a malacca stick with practised ease. His hair was snowy-white and swept back almost to his collar, and on it was cocked with indescribable panache a battered homburg. His tight-waisted, velveteen-collared overcoat was long out of fashion and badly frayed at the cuffs. His narrow-toed, patent-leather shoes were scuffed and down at the heels. Yet, so noble was his demeanor and so profound the sorrow written on his lined face that I found myself pitying his curious garb, rather than being moved to scorn by it.

He sat down beside me, propped his stick between his legs, and said, "It is a beautiful day, is it not?"

"Yes," I said, "it is." Then I felt a sudden apprehension. I am too easy a mark for the wayfarer's sad story, his melting eyes, his extended palm. I have never learned to say no to the humble derelict who stops me with hat in hand and asks for carfare to places he never intends to visit. Now I had the feeling that I knew what was coming, and I drew a tight rein on my suscepti-

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bilities. This time, I silently resolved, I would escape before it was too late.

But there was no escape. As I started to rise, my companion placed a hand on my shoulder and gently pressed me back into my seat. "It is a beautiful day," he said, "but what does that matter to one who is doomed to suffer and search, search and suffer through every day of his life, fair or foul?"

I was resigned to my fate, but in a bitter mood. He might tell his story to the end, but when he held out his hand for the expected offering he would get nothing more than a handshake. That much I took my oath on.

"Evidently," I said, concealing my true emotions with an effort, "you are spending your life in a search for something. What is that something?"

"A flea."

"A flea?"

The aged curio nodded somberly. "Yes, strange as it seems, that is the object of my search. But perhaps you will understand more readily if I reveal my name to you. It is Beidenbauer. Thaddeus Beidenbauer. There, does that enlighten you?"

He looked at me eagerly, but the light in his eyes faded when I shook my head. "No," I said, "I'm sorry to say it doesn't."

"It doesn't?"

"I'm afraid not."

Beidenbauer sighed. "Well, such is fame. A bubble—a glittering, weightless thing that one holds briefly in hand, and then—but let me tell you my story. There is pain and heartbreak in it, true, but I am inured to that now. I have lived my tragedy over and over so many times in my waking dreams that I can bear to talk about it freely when the occasion arises. I will tell it all to you just as it happened."

"I am sure you will," I said.

There was a time (Beidenbauer said) when my name was known in every mighty city of the world, when I was petted and sought after by the great, when I was drunk each day with my youth and wealth and the joy of my lot. Ah, I should have thought then how the gods destroy those who are too proud, but I did not. I lived only with the happy realization that I was the proprietor of Beidenbauer's Mighty Mites, the greatest flea circus on earth, the one that did more to honor the vast and unsung talents of the flea than any other before or since.

There have been flea circuses before mine and after mine, but always shabby affairs, dismal two-penny entertainments with none of the true glamor of the stage invested in them. But mine was different. It was superlative theater. Whether performed before the bumpkins who attend touring carnivals or before a soiree of society's bluest blue bloods, it never failed

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to stir the audience to its depths, to bring it to its feet shouting for endless encores. And all because as a mere child I had learned the secret of the relationship between the flea and its trainer, and with infinite patience had put the secret to work.

I can see you are wondering what the secret is; you will be astonished to learn of its simplicity. There is a strange and wonderful symbiosis between flea and man. The flea feeds from its trainer's arm and thus strengthened goes into the arena to perform. The money earned this way is then used by the trainer to buy him his dinner, to enrich his blood, that the performer may feed and return to his performance. So we have a perfect cycle, flea and man feeding off each other, each contributing to their mutual existence.

That is all there is to it, but I was the one to discover that there must be more than mere food involved in this relationship. There must be a symbiosis of emotions as well. Respect, sympathy, understanding, and love—yes, love—must be there, for the flea, a quivering mass of sensitivity, needs them desperately. And unlike all other trainers I provided them. Cruelty was the rule elsewhere. The harsh word, the heavy hand—these were all my confreres knew in trying to master and instruct the flea. But kindness was my rule, and for that reason I soared to success while all others remained mired in failure.

But enough of myself; after all, it was not I who entered the spotlighted ring every day to perform, to act the clown so that the crowd roared with laughter, to risk my neck in acrobatics so that it gasped, to woo it with grace so that it sighed in rapture. All this was done by the fleas, and it is they who must get the lion's share of admiration.

There were twenty-four members of the troupe, hand-picked, trained for weary hours on end, and it is impossible to imagine the range of their talents. But the unchallenged star of the show, and, sorrow of sorrows, the star of the tragedy I am unfolding, was a flea named Sebastian. Small, volatile, full of riotous wit and invention, he was our featured clown. And he was a true star in every respect. Tense and withdrawn before a performance, he was at ease the instant the spotlight fell on him and in absolute command of the audience.

I can see him now, waiting behind the scenes as the white silk handkerchief was laid on the table and tacks driven into each of its four corners to moor it securely. Then, as the darning hoop which was our main ring was set on it, Sebastian would fretfully start to pace up and down, his mouth drawn tight, his eyes faraway, fighting the fears reborn in him at every performance. I knew those signs, and I would give him a little nod—just one small nod—to make

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clear my confidence in him. And he would respond with a little nod of his own to show that he understood. It was our private ritual, those two almost imperceptible gestures, and it was all that was ever needed to assure another sterling performance from him. That, and the knowledge that the prima ballerina of our company, an enchanting, doe-eyed little flea named Selina, had eyes only for him and would stand worshipping from afar while he held the spotlight. For Selina, I think, was the only one on earth other than myself to whom he gave his unquestioning devotion.

But, alas, what he did not know at the time, and what I did not know—such is the cruel deviousness of the female heart—was that Selina worshipped only at the altar of his success. She loved him not for himself, but for the glory that was his: the laughter and applause of the crowd, the featured billing given him, and the favored place on my forearm at feeding time. She was a great dancer, but like too many of her kind she had no true warmth in her heart. Only a fanatic adoration of success.

Had I known that at the time I would have made a different turning somewhere along the road to disaster which lay ahead. But how could I know, how could anyone know, when Selina dissembled so brilliantly? When she looked at Sebastian with melting eyes she almost turned my head as well as his. She clung to him, comforted him in his times of doubt, let him know in a hundred different ways that he was her hero. And he, befuddled by her airs and graces, was completely her slave.

It was an apparently meaningless episode—meaningless at the time it occurred—that brought on the inexorable crisis. Hercules, our flea who performed feats of strength, had become old and stiff-legged, and one night while lifting a grape seed over his head before a hushed and awestruck audience he suddenly fell to the floor in a writhing agony. The veterinarian who diagnosed the case did not mince words. It was a serious rupture, he said grimly, and Hercules would perform no more.

It was shocking beyond measure to me, that news. Not only because of my warm regard for Hercules, but because it left me without one of my featured acts. I instantly gave orders to agents to scour the world, look high and low, pay any price for a flea who could duplicate Hercules' feats, but I did so with a heavy heart. I had already garnered the best there was in the entire world. What chance was there to find a replacement I had not previously considered and found unworthy?

But miracles can and do happen. I had rejected scores of applicants in despair when suddenly a cable arrived from an agent in Bulgaria.

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The length of the cable alone suggested his state of emotions, and what it said made them even more vivid. By pure chance he had enterd a broken-down cafe in Sofia where the guests were being entertained by a flea circus. Not even a circus. A few acts badly performed by sullen, half-starved fleas. But one flea there—! Nothing would do, save that I come at once and see for myself.

I did not believe him, because I knew he was inordinately proud of his native fleas who are, at best, temperamental performers; but I went. When a man is desperate he will do anything, even to putting his faith in the potentialities of a Bulgarian flea. So I went. And to paraphrase the saying: I came, I saw, I was conquered.

The flea was named Casimir, and even the unspeakable surroundings in which he performed could not dim his luster. Barrel-chested, bull-necked, glowing with health, and with a frank, open face that gave clear evidence of an honest nature and willing heart, he dwarfed the fleas around him to insignificance. I saw at a glance that I might be looking at a born star. I waited for his performance in a fever of impatience.

At last the motley acts that preceded his were finished, and the cafe loungers crowded close around the table, I in their forefront. The trainer, a wizened wretch, placed two small wooden blocks on the table, one of which had a series of steps carved into it. Between the blocks I could see a single strand of dark hair—evidently from the trainer's head since it shone greasily in the dim light around me—which was stretched taut from block to block. The trainer then placed Casimir on the table, and before the flea he placed a gleaming pin two inches long which he drew from his lapel.

I could not believe my eyes. To a flea that pin was as a length of railroad track would be to me, yet Casimir stooped low, got a grip on it, and with bulging muscles suddenly lifted it overhead. I gasped, but I had not yet seen the full capabilities of this magnificent creature. Holding the pin overhead he made his way to the steps of the block, climbed them, and then slowly, cautiously, he stepped onto the hair itself. The hair sagged under the weight on it, and Casimir balanced himself with an effort. Then with precise steps, secure as if he were affixed to that hair, he walked its full length, the pin held high overhead throughout and never wavering in his grip. Only when the other block had been reached and the pin laid down could you detect in the convulsive tremors of his body and the heaving of his chest what the strain must have been.

I knew even before the applause started that my search was over. Six hours later, after passionate bar-

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gaining and endless rounds of slivovitz, I paid for Casimir's contract more money than anyone on earth would ever have dreamed of paying for a flea. And at that I felt I was fortunate.

I took my prize home with me. I allowed time for him to become accustomed to our American ways; I filled his starved soul with my affection and trust; and only when I was sure that he was accepted by the rest of the company and felt at ease with them did I put him on the stage. That night was his night. When the final curtain fell he was the unchallenged star of the show. Simple, honest, unassuming, it was clear that he would not permit this honor to inflate him; but there was no question aboout it, he was the star. And Sebastian, the great Punchinello, the unparalleled clown, was in second place.

What were Sebastian's feelings then? What could they have been but anguish at having to yield his place to another. But whatever the torments he suffered, he was a trouper through and through. To him the show was the thing, and if he were asked to sacrifice himself to it, he would do so like a stoic. The quality of his performances remained superb. If anything, they were better than ever. Each time he entered the spotlight he flung himself into his role with an abandon, a virtuosity, far beyond the powers of most fleas.

No, it was not the loss of his commanding place in the company that finally shattered him; it was the loss of his beloved. Selina had seen his glory transferred to Casimir. She watched with narrowed eyes as a new star rose on the horizon. And with cold-blooded deliberation, never heeding the consequences, she turned from the old to worship the new. She had eyes only for Casimir now, comfort only for him, flattery only for him, and he, poor, simple-minded male, accepted this at first incredulously, then eagerly, then with rapture.

That was what destroyed Sebastian. The sight of the couple together transfixed him like a needle. And there was no escaping the sight, no turning away from it. Selina was unabashed in her pursuit, and Casimir nakedly reveled in it. The outsider might have seen this as a stirring romance; to Sebastian it would be an obscenity. Selina was his; what right did some burly stranger have to fondle her before his very eyes? He must have brooded himself into a state of madness over this.

The end came with shocking suddenness. It was during an evening performance, and the show had gone well until Casimir undertook his master feat. The audience leaned forward with bated breath as he lifted the pin over his head. It hummed with excitement as he climbed the block and set forth on his journey across the taut hair which stretched no less than a

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foot above the table. And it cried out in alarm when, as he reached the middle of the hair, it suddenly parted, and he plummeted to the table, the pin following him and crushing his chest.

I had leaped forward wildly when I saw the hair part, but I was too late. All I could do was remove the oppressive weight of the pin and turn my head away to conceal my tears from the expiring Casimir. He had his own pains to bear; I would spare him mine. But when my misted eyes fell on the broken strand of hair my grief turned to blazing rage. The hair had not worn through; it had been deliberately cut part of the way. I was looking, not at an accident, but at murder!

I knew at once who the murderer was. And I could tell from the shock on Selina's face and the growing comprehension on the face of every flea huddled there that the story was clear to all of them. But before I could wreak vengeance on the criminal my glance fell on Casimir, lying there, breathing his last. He looked at me with lustrous eyes full of pain; he tried to smile—oh, pitiful sight—and with a great effort he shook his head at me. He understood, too, noble soul, and he was telling me that vengeance was not for him. Only pity for the malefactor, and forgiveness. It was his last gesture on earth, and the lesson struck me to my heart. It wiped the thirst for vengeance out of me on the spot. I felt only a great need to find Sebastian, to tell him that I alone was the cause of the sorrows that had befallen us. Obsessed by pride in the show I had put another in his place, had deprived him of his beloved, had driven him at last to insanity and crime.

But when I looked for him I could not find him. Filled with horror at his deed he had fled into the night. And with his disappearance, with Casimir's death, with the company's morale destroyed, there was nothing left. I cancelled my bookings, broke up the company, and set forth with only one thought in mind—to find Sebastian, to face him as a penitent, and to win forgiveness from him.

It has been a weary search. I have walked the lonely streets day and night, combed dog shows and zoological parks, looked every place where a wanderer like Sebastian might take refuge. But all to no avail. I am old and poor now. I must rely on alms from strangers to help me on my way, but I will never give up my search until I am successful in it. There is no other way for me. I am doomed to suffer and search, search and suffer until then.

Beidenbauer's voice ceased and his narrative ended on this plaintive note. We sat together in silence for a long while, contemplating the pigeons burbling on the grass beyond, and then I said, "I have

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heard tell that the life span of the flea is extremely brief. Is it not likely that by now, in some unmarked grave—?"

"I do not allow myself to think of that," said Beidenbauer with deep feeling. "It would be the final blow."

"Yes," I said, "I can see that it would be."

We sat in silence again, and then with resignation I took a coin from my pocket and offered it to him. He only looked at it reproachfully. I sighed, put the coin away, and offered him a dollar bill. This he took.

"You are kind," he said, getting to his feet. "I am only sorry that you never saw my circus in its glory. You would better understand then how far I have fallen."

"Well," I said, "that's life."

"No, my friend," said Beidenbauer gravely, "that's show business."

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AUTHOR:	**MICHAEL GILBERT**
TITLE:	***A Case for Gourmets***
TYPE:	Detective Story
DETECTIVE:	Inspector Petrella
LOCALE:	London—mostly underground
TIME:	The Present
COMMENTS:	*If all detectives had as much fun in their cases as Inspector Petrella had in this one, a policeman's lot would be a happy one—and a reader's lot even more so!*

THE CURIOUS AND INVOLVED TRANSACTION WHICH IS RECORDED IN THE annals of Gabriel Street under the title of "Herring Jam" may be traced to its beginning in the Court of Mr. Whitcomb, the South Borough Stipendiary Magistrate.

Detective-Inspector Patrick Petrella, who was there on duty, was reminded of a remark once made to him by Sergeant Drage of the British Railways Police—to the effect that the traveling public were divisible into three classes. One, people who traveled without tickets; two, people who stole goods in transit; and three, people who defaced posters.

In the dock when he arrived, Petrella found an apple-cheeked old lady accused of traveling from Wimbledon to Charing Cross with a threepenny ticket. Her defense, which she was conducting herself, was that she had asked for a ticket to the Kennington Oval, but the booking clerk had misheard her.

"But surely, madam," said Mr. Whitcomb with the courtesy for which he was renowned, "it costs more than threepence to travel from Wimbledon to the Oval."

Certainly, agreed the old lady, but since the booking clerk was clearly stone-deaf, what was more likely than that when *she* had said the Kennington Oval, *he* had thought she said Colliers Wood.

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"But did it not occur to you that the fare to the Oval must be more than threepence?"

The old lady rode this one off. She said that she always paid exactly what booking clerks asked for. In her experience, sometimes they asked for more, sometimes less. She never argued with them.

"And why," said Mr. Whitcomb, who believed in leaving no avenue unexplored, "if you had been given a ticket to Colliers Wood, in mistake for a ticket to the Oval, did you ultimately alight at Charing Cross?"

The old lady said she had mistaken it for Trafalgar Square.

It took some time to get this one sorted out (absolute discharge—coupled with a severe warning) and then Ronald Duckworth was called forward. Mr. Duckworth was charged with an act of wilful damage, committed on the premises of the London Passenger Transport Board, in that he, on the previous Tuesday, had attempted to tear down a poster at Borough High Street Underground Station, the property of Barleymow Breakfast Bricks Ltd., the said poster advertising their wares.

Mr. Duckworth pleaded guilty, and an L.P.T.B. Inspector stated that at about five minutes past eleven on the evening before last, one of the porters at Borough High Street Station, a Mr. Sampson, returning to the platform, had observed the accused, who had apparently thought he was alone, seize a loose corner of the advertisement in question and tear it sharply in an upward direction.

"Are you perhaps not fond of Barleymow's Breakfast Bricks?" inquired Mr. Whitcomb with every evidence of sympathy.

Mr. Duckworth said no. It wasn't that—it was just an impulse.

Mr. Whitcomb said that such impulses, though understandable (he much preferred porridge himself) ought to be resisted. He ordered Mr. Duckworth to pay the costs of the prosecution and bound him over conditionally on his undertaking to leave all posters, however offensive the products they advertised, alone for the next twelve months.

Mr. Duckworth departed thankfully. The next case was Petrella's, and it was not one which he viewed with any enthusiasm at all.

The charge, against Albert Mundy, was one of receiving goods well knowing them to be stolen goods. The facts were simple enough. Mr. Mundy, an electrician working in the Wandsborough Power Station, had purchased a television set from a man he had met in the Saloon Bar of a public house.

They had had a few drinks and the man had told Mundy a long story of a mix-up which had resulted in the man being in possession of two television sets. "It's a brand-new set," he said. "I've got it outside in the car now. I'd be glad to get rid of it for half what I paid for it."

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Mr. Mundy was not only an electrician. He knew quite a lot about television sets. It was, as he saw when he went out to inspect it, a brand-new one. The maker's and wholesaler's labels were still on it.

Even if (as Mr. Mundy half suspected) it contained some hidden defect, he was confident that he could put it right, and it was still a staggering bargain. He hurried home, produced the money from a reserve which he kept under a loose floorboard, and clinched the deal. The set proved to be in perfect condition. It also, unfortunately, turned out to have been one of a consignment of twelve stolen in transit between Manchester and Tooley Street Goods Depot—probably at the depot itself.

There was a good deal to be said on both sides: on the side of Mr. Mundy, that he was an honest citizen with a hitherto unblemished record, and that he had no positive proof that the set was a stolen one; on the side of the authorities, that Mr. Mundy had himself admitted that he thought the deal a fishy one, and that people who buy television sets for half the list price from strangers in public houses must take the consequences of their actions.

There was also a third powerful, but unexpressed, argument—that several million pounds' worth of goods was being lost every year by pilfering in transport, a loss which fell on the Transport services, their insurers, and, ultimately, on the public.

It was a very close thing, and the sweat stood in beads on Mr. Mundy's forehead before the Magistrate finally decided to give weight to his previously blameless record and dismiss the case.

Petrella thought that substantial justice had been done. Mr. Mundy had been given a bad fright. To imprison him would have been bad luck on Mr. Mundy's family and would not have hurt the real criminals—those who stole and organized the stealing. For the losses were now so large and so regular that they had a look of organization about them.

"We do what we can," said Sergeant Drage. "We can't watch the men at work. To do that properly you'd need one railway policeman for each worker. Anyway, most of them are honest enough. The few who aren't do a disproportionate amount of damage. It's worst towards Christmas—more stuff about and a lot of casual labor taken on for the holiday season."

"If you can't watch them, how do you hope to stop them?"

"Keep your eyes and ears open. Make the places as difficult as we can to get in and out, and organize snap searches when they come off duty."

"I see," said Petrella. "The old ring-fence system. You can't stop them taking it, but you can make it difficult for them to get away with it."

Superintendent Benjamin held monthly conferences at Causeway, which

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the Detective-Inspectors in charge of stations attended. Petrella, from Gabriel Street, Groves from the Common, and Merriam from Tooley Street. In October, and again in November, the first item on his agenda, displacing even such established favorites as shoplifting and juvenile delinquency, was thefts from the railways.

"The Insurance Companies are starting to kick," said Benjamin. "They're bullying the Commissioner, the Commissioner's given a rocket to District, and the tail-end of the stick's landed on me."

"Isn't it really a job for the Railway Police?" said Merriam.

"Surely," said Benjamin. "But once stuff's been stolen, it's our job too. If they can't stop them lifting it, we must stop them disposing of it. At least, that's the idea. We've got three big goods yards plumb in our area—Tooley Street, Red Cross, and Bricklayers Arms. What I suggest is—"

He went on to lay down certain principles for patrolling outside these depots. They were sound enough, in their way, but his subordinates knew as well as Benjamin did that it was like trying to watch an acre of rabbit warren with one man and one dog.

It was in the second week in November that Mr. Duckworth reappeared in Mr. Whitcomb's Court. The charge this time had rather more serious elements in it.

It appeared that the staff of Southwark Underground Station had been on the point of closing down for the night. The last passenger train had gone through, and the last passenger, as they imagined, had been shepherded out into the street. Happening to come down to the platform for a final look-round, the porter had heard a suspicious noise from inside the closet where cleaning materials and other odds and ends were stored.

Being a man of discretion, he had fetched the stationmaster and the ticket collector before investigating, and the three of them had then returned to the platform. The closet door was open, and the accused, who must have been hiding in the cubicle, was engaged in tearing down a number of posters affixed only that morning to the wall of the station.

Mr. Duckworth, who looked even more embarrassed than on the previous occasion, again pleaded guilty and said that he had again acted on impulse.

"As I said on the previous occasion," observed Mr. Whitcomb, "it is understandable that a man might have a sudden, and perhaps overmastering, impulse to tear down a poster. But to secrete yourself in a cupboard, after the station had been closed for the night, and then come out and start systematically to pull down posters hardly seems to me to be conduct which could be properly described as impulsive."

Mr. Duckworth looked unhappy, and said that he was very sorry. Mr.

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Whitcomb, a copy of the record of the earlier case in front of him, pondered for a few minutes, and then announced that he was far from happy about the matter. He wished further inquiries to be made (the Court Missioner sighed audibly) and he would put back Mr. Duckworth's case for one week. He understood that the accused was a respectable family man. He could have bail on his own recognisances, for seven days.

Petrella, who was in Court in connection with another matter, caught the Missioner at the door and said, "When you've finished with him, let me have a go at him."

"Have him first if you like," said the Missioner. "He's daft as a coot. His mother was probably frightened by a railway poster when she was a girl."

"I'm not sure," said Petrella. He had, by now, a fairly extensive knowledge of the cranks, crackpots, and fanatics who took up so much police time and afforded such entertaining copy for the court reporters of the leading evening newspapers; but he was far from convinced that Mr. Duckworth was a crank or crackpot.

So he took Duckworth out and bought him a cup of tea, and listened with infinite patience to the story of his life. Mr. Duckworth was an interior decorator, and an amateur soldier of the late War, during which he had served with credit in an Artillery Regiment, rising to the rank of Sergeant. He had a wife and three children (whose photographs Petrella inspected). He was a supporter of Charlton Athletic, and a keen darts player. And, he added, there was nothing at all wrong with his eyes.

Petrella felt that they might now be approaching the heart of the mystery. He ordered second cups of tea for both of them.

"Nothing wrong with my eyes at all," repeated Mr. Duckworth.

"Who suggested there was?" said Petrella.

"No one actually suggested it," said Mr. Duckworth crossly. "It was just that—look here, if I tell you this story from the beginning, will you promise not to laugh at me?"

"I never laugh on duty," said Petrella.

"No, I mean that. It's—it's quite mad. It's—it's sort of fourth dimensional. You know what I mean?"

"Science fiction?" suggested Petrella helpfully.

"That's right—that's just what I mean! You walk out of one's life into another. That's why I'd rather people thought I was a crook than they thought I was cracked, if you follow me."

"Lots of people think like that," said Petrella. "Just you tell me about it."

It was, in its elements, quite a simple story. Mr. Duckworth had been

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attending a reunion at the Regimental Headquarters in North London, a function he attended annually and which was, as he put it, "the one time in the year he really let his hair down."

Being an old soldier, before plunging into the fray, he had carefully secured his line of retreat. The nearest station to the headquarters in question was Highgate Archway, on the Northern Line. His home station was Colliers Wood, on the same line. The last train left Highgate at ten minutes before midnight.

With these essential facts firmly engraved in his memory, Mr. Duckworth had settled down to enjoy himself in congenial company, had drunk quite a few pints of beer and a couple (but, he thought, not more than a couple) of whiskies, and had caught his train at Highgate with two minutes to spare. As soon as the train started, he had gone to sleep.

An indeterminate number of minutes later he had wakened with a start and with the strong conviction that he had reached his own station and was about to be carried past it. The train, sure enough, was stationary, and the doors were open. There was not a moment to lose. Fortunately, he was sitting in a seat near to, and facing, the doors, and just as they closed he hurled himself between them.

The doors shut behind him, the train jerked into motion, and disappeared. A solitary porter, in the far distance, also disappeared, leaving Mr. Duckworth still dazed from the combined effects of sleep and drink, alone on the platform.

His overmastering desire was to sit down somewhere for a few minutes and recuperate. Behind him, at the far end of the platform, was a recess which had possibly once contained a seat. It seemed to Mr. Duckworth to be exactly what he wanted. He got his back comfortably against one end, his feet against the other, and settled down to a period of reflection.

When he opened his eyes he was in darkness—a sort of dim-blue darkness, broken by one very bright light.

His head, he said, was comparatively clear. He had discovered earlier that no matter how much beer he drank, give him half an hour's sleep, and he'd be more or less all right.

Petrella interrupted to say, "How long do you think you had been asleep?"

Difficult to say, said Mr. Duckworth, but not, he thought, more than half an hour. He had then staggered to his feet and had seen that the bright light was a small floodlight at platform level. It was so placed that it lit up the platform side of the station which (he was clear-headed enough to note) was not one of the modern type, all gleaming tiles and

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cement, but quite an old-fashioned one with upright wooden billboards. The light, as he observed when he reached it, was shining directly onto one of these billboards—almost as if it had been placed there purposely to illuminate it. The effect was emphasized by the fact that the billboards on both sides were blank.

"I take it," said Petrella, "you'd realized by this time you weren't at Colliers Wood?"

"Oh, yes. I realized I'd jumped off the train too soon and should have a long walk home. I wasn't worried about being locked up in the station. If there were lights on, there must be people still working. The next bit is something I can't remember very clearly at all. I thought I heard a noise behind me, a sort of scraping noise—and then the ceiling fell on me. Or that's what it felt like. Something hard and heavy landed on top of my head, and before I had time to feel anything else, I was falling forward and—well, the next thing I knew, I was opening my eyes. It was five o'clock of a perishing gray morning, and I was on a seat, just off the road, in the middle of South Borough Common."

He waited, defiantly, for comment.

Petrella said, "You might have dreamed it all, of course. Someone might have given you a lift back from the reunion and tried to find out where you lived. You were too pickled to give him your address, so he propped you up on the seat to cool off. Not very friendly, but it could have happened."

"All right," said Mr. Duckworth. "Then how do you account for the fact that I'd still had my ticket with me? I found it in my waistcoat pocket."

"Then," agreed Petrella, "it might have happened just as you said. You butted in on something you weren't meant to see, got slugged and dumped."

"I thought that out for myself," said Mr. Duckworth. "Only not quite as quickly, because I had a nasty lump on the back of my head—that wasn't imaginary. It was sore as hell—and the father and mother of a hangover—and I had my wife to deal with. She'd got into a real state and gone to the police, and then when I turned up—"

"I can imagine that bit," said Petrella.

"Yes, well, I thought about it, and I had the same idea as you. I thought I'd start by finding what station it really was."

"That shouldn't have been too difficult," said Petrella. "Most of the stations on that bit of line have been modernized, and besides, you saw at least one of the advertisements—the one the light was shining on."

"That's just it," said Mr. Duckworth.

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"*Didn't* you see it?"

"Yes, I did. And I wish I hadn't. It's been getting me down. Here's where you've promised not to laugh. What I saw—and I saw it quite clearly—and if I shut my eyes I can see it now—what I saw was three lines of writing, with one word on each line. It said GET HERRING JAM."

Petrella stared at him.

"Now be honest," said Mr. Duckworth. "Isn't that where you start thinking I've got a screw loose? If you do, you're not the only one. I began to think it myself."

Petrella said, "You say you can visualize it? What sort of print was it, and how were the three lines arranged?"

"Ordinary capital letters. On the large side, but not enormous. The GET was on the top and a bit to the left. The middle line was HERRING —that ran right across. The JAM was the bottom line and a bit to the right."

"I see," said Petrella. "I suppose there isn't some other advertisement rather like—"

"I've been up and down every perishing station between Waterloo and Balham twenty times and there's nothing like it at all—nothing remotely like it! Most of 'em are pictures of girls. There's some in writing, like notices telling you to buy Premium Bonds and drink somebody or other's stout."

"But no herrings?"

"Not a fish among 'em. That's how I got the idea that it might have been an advertisement that had been covered up with another one. They change 'em about once a week. So—"

Light dawned on Petrella.

"So you started pulling off the new ones to see what the old ones said underneath."

"It'd sort of got me by that time," said Mr. Duckworth. "I can't explain it. But what I felt was, if I can find that advert, then perhaps I can find out what happened to me that night. If I can't—well, maybe I'm mad. I expect you think I'm mad anyway."

"No," said Petrella slowly. "I don't think you're mad at all.

He said the same thing to Mr. Wetherall that evening. Mr. Wetherall was headmaster of the South Borough Secondary School, and when Petrella had fallen out with two landladies in succession (in both cases over the peculiar house he kept and his excessive use of the telephone) Wetherall had suggested to Petrella that he set up house in the two empty

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rooms below his own in the big house in Brinkman Road. It was a bit far from Gabriel Street, but otherwise it suited Petrella perfectly. It had been great fun furnishing the rooms, and he enjoyed an occasional after-dinner gossip with Mr. Wetherall.

"I don't think I'd have started trespassing and pulling down advertisements," said Mr. Wetherall. "I'd have gone to one of the big agents who does advertising on the Underground, and asked him to find out what advertisements were showing that week."

"You might have," said Petrella, "and so might I, and the agent might have told us. But not someone like Mr. Duckworth."

"Have you located the station?"

"I've had a shot at it. The trouble is that going from Highgate to Colliers Wood, Mr. Duckworth could have gone one of two ways—via Charing Cross—that's the West End route—or via Bank. All the stations on the West End route are modern tile and chromium jobs. But one or two of the stations on the Bank route would fit. London Bridge, Southwark, and Borough High Street are all possibles."

"Since you've done some work on it, I take it you don't think he made the whole thing up?"

"No, I don't," said Petrella. "But I couldn't explain why."

Mr. Wetherall puffed his horrible pipe for a few seconds and then said, "No, you can't, can you? I mean, you can't tell how you know when people are telling the truth, but it's a fact that you can. I've found that often with boys." He reflected again and said, "I think you'd better have a word with my friend, Raynor-Hasset. He'll tell you all you want to know about the London railway system. He used to be a schoolmaster, but he's retired now. He lives in one of those little houses up on the Heath. I'll give him a ring and let him know you're coming."

Petrella knew that Mr. Wetherall seldom made recommendations idly. So the following evening he called on Mr. Raynor-Hasset. Mr. Wetherall's friend had a corvine face and a slight stoop, as if much of his life had been spent in exploring places with low roofs.

"I don't imagine," he said, when they had settled down in front of the fire, "that you have ever heard of the Spurs?"

"The Spurs?"

"Not the football team," said Mr. Raynor-Hasset with a thin smile. "The Society for the Preservation of Unused Railway lines. I have the honor to be their Secretary."

"I'm afraid not," said Petrella. "What do you do?"

"Just as speleologists explore the recesses and convolutions of our caves, we delight in tracking down the railway lines which run under this

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great city. It is a curious fact but once a railway line has been constructed, it may be covered over—*but it is hardly ever filled in again.*"

"I suppose not."

"Most people imagine, when they think about it, that our main railway lines stop well short of the center of London. The Northern ones at Euston, Kings Cross, and St. Pancras. The Southern ones at Waterloo and Victoria. It is far from true, of course. I could name you half a dozen ways of crossing London from North to South by steam train. I conducted a special trip along the Blackfriars, Holborn, Kentish Town line myself last year. And did you know that there was an old but still usable railway line, part of the original Charing Cross Bayswater switch, which runs within a hundred yards of the Eros statue in Piccadilly? The entrance to it is through a shop—"

Petrella listened, entranced, as Mr. Raynor-Hasset described and expounded to him that curious system of disused passages and tunnels, of unsuspected tracks, of forgotten stairways and phantom stations (akin to the traces in the human system of some dread but dead disease) which the private enterprise of our railway pioneers had left under the unsuspecting surface of London.

During an interval, while his host brewed cocoa for them, Petrella explained the idea which had come into his head.

Mr. Raynor-Hasset cleared the table and spread on it a map of large scale. "It's a very feasible idea," he said. "I think that the Tooley Street Goods Yard would be the one to start with. You have had losses from there—serious losses. Quite so. You'll note that although it is now linked to London Bridge by part of the ordinary Southern system, its previous history is far from simple. It began life as a private depot for goods coming up the river to St. Saviour's Dock—a horse-drawn tramway connected it to Dockhead; or you could get at it under the River by the old subway—it's disused now—that came out at Stanton's Wharf. Plenty of possibilities there. As for the underground stations—" Mr. Raynor-Hasset shook his head. "If people had any idea what lay behind those shiny, well-lit platforms, they'd be pretty surprised."

He consulted his chart again. "If I had to make a guess I'd say that the connection lies between Tooley Street and Southwark. And I'll tell you why. Southwark Underground must be within a very short distance of the connecting line which the old Brighton and South Coast—who shared London Bridge with the South Easter and Chatham—ran across to Waterloo. It was never a great success, as passengers found it just as easy to go straight through from London Bridge, and it was closed to traffic in the eighties. You can see it marked here."

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Petrella followed the spidery lines on the map and found his excitement kindling.

"I really believe," he said, "that you must be right."

"There's no need to rely on guesswork. Why don't we go and see?"

Petrella looked at him.

"With your authority," said Mr. Raynor-Hasset, "and my experience, I should anticipate no difficulty. I take it you can square it with the authorities."

"Yes, certainly."

"Then I suggest tomorrow night. We will meeet at—shall we say, eleven o'clock at Bermondsey South? The old Station, on the North side of the Rotherhithe Road. Dress in your oldest clothes."

At a few minutes after eleven the following night Petrella was following Mr. Raynor-Hasset down a flight of wooden steps. At the bottom of the steps a man was waiting for them.

"I've opened her up," he said. "Had to use a pint of oil. Must be five years since anyone went through there."

"Almost exactly five years," said Mr. Raynor-Hasset. "I took a party along there myself. Thank you very much, Sam." Some coins changed hands. "You lock up behind. We'll probably be coming out at Waterloo."

"I'll give 'em a ring," said Sam. The door opened into what looked at first sight, like a brick wall, but which was in fact the bricked-up entrance to a railway tunnel. It shut behind them with a solid thud, cutting off light, air, and sound.

"I should have asked you before we started," said Mr. Raynor-Hasset, "whether you suffered at all from claustrophobia."

"I don't think so," said Petrella. "I've never really found out."

"One man I took with me was so severely overcome that he fell flat on his face and when I endeavored to assist him he bit me—in the left leg. Straight ahead now."

It was quite easy going. The rails were gone, and the old permanent way had become covered, in the course of time, by a thin deposit of dried earth mixed with soot from the tunnel roof. The only discomfort was the dust they kicked up as they walked.

"Ventilation is sometimes a problem," said Mr. Raynor-Hasset. "It was originally quite adequate, but one of two of the shafts have become blocked with the passage of time. In a really old tunnel I have used a safety lamp, but we should be all right here." He paused to consult the map, and a pedometer which was pinned to the front of his coat. "There's an air shaft somewhere here. Yes—you can catch a glimpse of the sky."

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Petrella looked up a narrow opening and was pleased to see the stars winking back at him. The light of the torch shone on something white. It was a tiny heap of bones.

"A dog, I should imagine," said Mr. Raynor-Hasset. "On we go. We've much ground to cover."

They went on in silence. Petrella soon lost count of time and distance. His guide used his torch sparingly, and as they paced forward into the blackness, Petrella began to feel the oppression of the entombed, a consciousness of the weight of earth above him. The air grew thicker, and was there—or was it his imagination—greater difficulty in breathing?

"We must," he said, his voice coming out in a startling croak, "we must be nearly the other side of London by now."

Mr. Raynor-Hasset halted, clicked on his torch, and said, "One mile and nearly one furlong. By my calculations we are just passing under Bricklayers Arms Depot. We go past the North East corner, and then we should swing through nearly a quarter turn to the right . . . Yes, here we are. Better keep an eye for possible entrances on our left."

He kept his torch alight for two hundrd yards, but the brick walls remained unbroken. Ahead of them pink beads winked and flushed in the light, retreating before them.

"Rats," said Mr. Raynor-Hasset. "But a timid bunch. I carry a few Guy Fawkes squibs to throw at them, but I've never had to use them."

They walked on in silence.

Petrella, who was gradually becoming acclimatized, calculated that they had gone forward another mile when Mr. Raynor-Hasset spoke again.

"Can you feel," he said, "a slight dampness?"

"It's less dusty, certainly."

"There's a water seepage here. Nothing serious—some defect in drainage. We must be almost under the old Leathermarket."

Petrella tried to visualize the geography of that part of London.

"In that case," he said, "we shouldn't be far from Tooley Street."

"About two hundred yards."

The torch came on again. Ahead of them the surface shone, black and slimy. The smell was unspeakable. Even Mr. Raynor-Hasset noticed it.

"Quite fresh, isn't it?" he said. "We'll keep the torch on now for a bit."

When they came to it, the side entrance was easy to see. It sloped upward, gently, to the right. Mr. Raynor-Hasset took a compass bearing and marked his map.

"I should think there's no doubt at all," he said. "That's an old loading track and it goes straight to Tooley Street Depot. You'll probably find it comes out in a loading pit. Do you wish to follow it?"

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But Petrella's eyes were on the ground. "Could you point your torch here a moment" he said. "Look. That's not five years old."

It was a cigarette carton.

"No, indeed," said Mr. Raynor-Hasset. "And those, I think, are footprints. How very interesting!"

Clearly to be seen in the mud was a beaten track of men's boot prints that led from the mouth of the shaft and onward up the tunnel.

"Keep your torch on them," said Petrella. "This is going to save me a lot of trouble."

"It looks as if an army has passed this way."

An army of soldier-ants, thought Petrella. An army bearing burdens.

Four hundred yards, and the line of footprints turned into a track branching down to the left. Mr. Raynor-Hasset again checked his position, and said, "Southwark Underground Station, or I'm a Dutchman."

They went sharply down for a short distance, then the track leveled out, ran along, and climbed again, finally emerging into a circular antechamber. Above their heads an iron staircase spiraled upward into the gloom.

"Southwark," said Mr. Raynor-Hasset, "was one of those stations which was developed forward. I mean that when they redesigned it, they put in a moving staircase at the far end, with the lifts, and closed the old emergency stair shaft altogether. That is what we have come out into.

But Petrella was not listening to him. The light of the torch had revealed, strewn around the foot of the staircase, an astonishing jumble of cartons, crates, boxes, sacks, and containers of every shape and size.

"This where they unpack the stuff," he said. "I wonder where they store it. Can we get out onto the platform?"

"Certainly. I think this must be the way."

There was a door in the boarding ahead of them, secured by three stout bolts.

"What time is it?"

"Just after two o'clock."

"Should be all right," said Petrella.

He slid the bolts and swung the door open. They stepped through and found themselves on the platform of Southwark Underground Station, lit only by the ghostly blue lamps which shine all night to guide the maintenance trolleys.

"What are we looking for?" said Mr. Raynor-Hasset.

"There must, I think, be more storage space. Have you a knife? It would be about here, I'd guess. Hold the torch steady a moment."

Petrella slid the blade between the boards, choosing the place with pre-

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cision. He felt a latch lifting and levered strongly with the knife blade. A section of boarding hinged out toward them.

"Good gracious," said Mr. Raynor-Hasset mildly.

The deep recess contained, stacked on shelves and floor, an astonishing assortment of goods. There were piled cartons of cigarettes, wooden boxes with the stamp of a well-known whiskey firm, portable typewriters, wireless and television sets, bales of textiles, a pair of sporting rifles, boxes of shoes, cases of tinned food.

"A producer-to-consumer service," said Petrella grimly.

His mind was already busy constructing exactly the sort of police trap that would be necessary: two cars in the street above, to catch the people when they came to collect; men in the tunnel itself, beyond the opening, to seal the far end; and a very cautious reconnaisance to find out how the Tooley Street end worked.

He was standing on the platform, thinking about all this, when suddenly he started to laugh. Mr. Raynor-Hasset edged perceptibly away.

"It's quite all right," said Petrella. "I'm not going to start biting you in the leg. Hold the torch on that wall. Now watch, while I open and shut those two doors."

Mr. Raynor-Hasset did so, and then himself gave a dry cackle. "Very ingenious," he said.

Two advertisements stood next to each other on the billboard. They were very close, with only a thin margin between them.

When the doors were shut, the two advertisements read:

THIS YEAR'S TARGET
BUY YOURSELF ANOTHER
PREMIUM BOND

RING PARK 0906
JAMES BOND & SONS
Everything for your car

When both doors were opened, most of the left-hand advertisement and most of the right-hand advertisement were neatly cut away; and when the cut-away parts vanished into the darkness of the opened doors, all that remained of the adjoining advertisements was:

GET
HER RING
JAM

"I couldn't help thinking," said Petrella, "that we have, at least, set Mr. Duckworth's mind at rest."

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EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR: **GORDON GASKILL**

TITLE: ***Murder on Skis***

TYPE: Detective Novelette

DETECTIVE: Colonel Bird, formerly U.S. Army C.I.D.

LOCALE: Swiss Alps

TIME: The Present

COMMENTS: *Not even the world's best pistol shot could hit a moving target high in the air, but that is exactly what happened—murder on a ski lift during an international women's ski tournament . . . a fascinating background.*

WALKING OUT OF THE PLUSHY shade of the Snow Queen Hotel, I had to stop a minute, blinking, until my eyes got used to the snow glare. In the blazing noon sunshine the Swiss Alps were as bright as an A-bomb blast I'd once seen in Nevada. Then I threw the skis over my shoulder and headed for the ski lift.

I noticed, not far ahead of me, a slim figure in smart red ski clothes, also heading for the lift. I slowed down, deliberately. Normally I wasn't allergic to beautiful women, but this Rosemary Warden . . . I'd known her only the two weeks we'd been at the same hotel and every day I liked her less.

The dawdling worked. When I reached the lift station, she'd already gone ahead, a flash of red far up the cableline. At any other time of day the lift was jam-packed, especially since the Swiss international women's ski tournament had started yesterday. But around noon most skiers were already up on the slopes, ready for lunch at one of the way stations. I had a double-seated chair to myself. The attendant snapped the wooden safety bar into place and pulled the release lever.

All my life I've skied, and now that I've retired from the Army I ski even more. But I still got a bang when the ski-lift cable grabbed

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my chair, like a friendly eagle, and swung me high up into the snow and the sunlight. Once away from the roaring machinery of the lift station there was no noise except the slight cable-humming, the rattling clicks as the chair bumped over the supporting pylons.

The seats faced outward. Dropping away behind me was Grindelwald itself; towering off to the left was the great ominous north side of the Eiger, which killed so many climbers. At the Oberhaus station an attendant pulled my chair over a hunting track and I was off on the next lap to Bort, the halfway point that separates the men from the boys. Above Bort the runs are tough; below Bort they're easy.

I floated over the "Devil's Doorstep," a dangerous clifflike break in the mountain's smooth slope. If you ever came to it on skis, moving fast, not knowing about it . . . But it was well guarded. Warning barricades, striped black and yellow, were staggered uphill from it, and the ski run made a long detour around it.

A sudden cracking sound made my heart miss a couple of beats, in spite of the confidence I have in Swiss ski lifts. But the cable moved along normally in the greased pulleys and soon I was passing above an isolated little hummock, covered with spruce, so near that I could almost grab some twigs. A few minutes later I was hauled into the Bort station.

I waited for somebody to shunt me over for the next lap, for I was planning to lunch at the last stop, perversely named First. Nobody came. I called out, but the roaring machinery drowned my voice. I got tired of waiting, opened the safety bar, and stepped down from the swaying chair. I stamped around to the other side of the machinery, and stopped, staring.

The two attendants were bent over the chair that had come in before mine. Over a slumped red figure whose gay ski jacket was being dyed now with a deeper scarlet, slowly spreading. My mouth felt suddenly dry. I'd seen plenty of combat, but I'd never seen a woman shot to death before . . .

Waiting for the police to come up, I sat on the sun terrace of the little restaurant a few steps from the Bort station. I drank strong hot coffee. I needed it.

On the empty table next to me somebody had left a copy of an American tabloid published in Europe. I picked it up and turned to the editorial page, where Rosemary Warden's column, *Footlose Female,* was always printed. I stared at the thumbnail picture of her.

Beautiful? Yes, she'd been that, even in the blurred half-tone engraving: slim, rounded, with a lovely face. Her eyes, I knew, were as blue as the heart of a glacier, and just as cold. I'd always liked the name Rosemary before; it had

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meant something warm and womanly, modest, sweet, a little old-fashioned. Rosemary Warden had been the exact reverse: mercenary, malicious, cruel, sly. Yet she'd had chic, too, and brains. Her column was vicious scandal, just this side of libel, but it was cleverly done. If a man wrote such stuff he'd have his jaw smashed twice a day; only a woman could get away with it.

But she *hadn't* got away with it, I thought suddenly. Or did her murder not have anything to do with her column? She must have made hundreds of enemies with her typewriter, but would any of them have picked up a gun and shot her?

She had been shot in the back of her head, just above the neck. And if I knew anything about weapons, she had been shot with a very heavy pistol. I lighted a cigarette, irritably. It didn't add up. Not even the world's best pistol shot could hit a moving target high in the air.

Then I remembered the cracking sound. I'd thought it was something in the lift mechanism, but now I stared down the cableway, estimating times and distance.

People came and went while I sat there. Some came up the lift and skied down; others skied in from higher up, then took the lift to the top again. Some of them, from my hotel, waved to me and I waved back. A girl in a powder-blue costume got off the lift and sat down at the other end of the terrace.

I was still thinking when a chair-lift pulled slowly into Bort with two men on it, one in the gray uniform of the Swiss police. I got up and walked to meet them. On the way I had to pass the girl who had just come in and I saw it was Suska Smithfield, a Czech girl married to a rich young American. They were at our hotel, too, and she was entered in the international ski tournament.

She looked up as I came near, smiled, and said in her faintly accented voice, "You look far too gloomy for such a gorgeous day, Colonel Bird"

She didn't look especially gay herself. Her face was drawn. Probably, I thought, the tension of the race. I saw no reason not to tell her about Rosemary Warden.

"Dead!" she whispered, a hand going to her throat. "Murdered! But how . . ."

"I don't know," I said and walked on.

The police sergeant was a thick-necked suspicious Swiss whose biggest case until now had probably been overtime parking. He wanted to give me a hard time because, I gathered, I'd been the only other person on that stretch of the ski lift at the time of the murder, and because, as a retired Army officer, I was presumably a good pistol shot.

I say I "gathered" because he spoke only a valley dialect that was a mangled version of High German. After three years with our oc-

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cupation Army in Heidelberg my own German was pretty good, but I hardly understood a word he said. Fortunately the doctor with him, who made a fair fortune every winter setting broken arms and legs at the ski resort, spoke High German and a little English.

"Explain to the sergeant," I told the doctor, "that she was at least five hundred meters ahead of me and that no pistol ever made is that good—and no marksman, either. Tell him, as a matter of fact, that I'm the only person in the Alps who could not *possibly* have killed her." I hesitated a moment. "You might tell him also that while I'm certainly no detective, I did have a two-year posting once to our Army C.I.D.—criminal investigation. If he has a minute to spare I think I can tell him how she was shot and from where—but not who did it."

The police sergeant listened sullenly to the translation, but his eyes brightened a little at the last part. I pointed down to the little spruce-covered hummock that thrust itself up so near to the cableline.

"A perfect ambush," I said. "Someone could have been hiding in the spruce. She'd be passing slowly, almost in arm's reach, her back to the murderer. He couldn't miss."

I then described the "crack" I'd heard that must have been the fatal shot; I pointed out about where my own chair had been at that moment, and how far hers had been ahead of me.

"It would put her right at that hummock," I said. I bent to snap on my skis. "Let's go down and see."

Both men had brought skis and we were down by the hummock in a few seconds. At first I thought I'd been wrong; the front side of the hummock was pure and untouched, after last night's snow. But when we began circling it, the police sergeant gave a sudden grunt and pointed. At the back of the hummock, perfect herringbone tracks up, and slashing tracks down, showed where a single skier had been.

We climbed the hummock ourselves and found the ambush spot easily—where the snow had been disturbed. As a chair-lift moved slowly by, I reached out and the top of my ski pole scraped along it. But we found no cartridge case, no cigarette stubs—no clue.

The doctor suggested eagerly, "Can't you trace the ski tracks? Identify them?"

The sergeant and I shook our heads at the same time. Ski tracks are as anonymous as a ship's wake at sea. As for following them, hardly more than a hundred yards from the hummock they were lost forever among the thousands of other tracks that formed the main ski run.

But I knew one thing: Only a master skier could have done such a perfect herringbone or come down the hummock's steep face so fast and skillfully . . .

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What are vaguely called the "formalities" took forever. My own statement had to be laboriously translated back and forth in English, in German, and in Swiss-German. Finally I left the police station and walked slowly toward the Snow Queen Hotel. It was long past lunch time and I was starving.

From a distance I saw Freddy Schmidt, the hotel owner, standing in the entrance in ski clothes. Although Swiss, he'd served a long apprenticeship in a great New York hotel. He knew what Americans liked, spoke American like a native, understood the big hello and the friendly smile.

He wasn't smiling now. He took me aside, worried. "The police had me lock up her room, Colonel, with a guard on it. What happened?"

I made it short. When I finished, he asked, "And you're sure it was a pistol, Colonel? Not a rifle or a shotgun?"

"After thirty-five years in the Army, Freddy," I said, "I think I know the difference. Besides, a man would look a little funny going up the ski lift with a rifle under his arm. He could hide a pistol in his pocket."

"Sure," he said irritably. "The worst of it is, one of my guests, Stanton Pollock, reported a pistol stolen from his room this morning. A .375 Magnum, whatever that is."

Light dawned. It had been a terrific wound, but a .375 Magnum had the shock power to make it. Also, I'd wondered how anybody could obtain a pistol in strictly controlled Switzerland, or would dare bring one in. This was clear now, too. Stanton Pollock owned Pollock & Pender, a big American jewel firm. And I knew that people in the jewelry business were allowed to carry guns.

Freddy was saying, "He only reported it about ten this morning, before he went out skiing. I didn't tell the police because . . . well, it might turn up, and I didn't want a lot of cops prowling around, bothering people."

"I hope you've told them now," I said. "They'll be prowling anyway. An Inspector from Berne will be along any minute now."

He lighted a cigarette. "Anyway, it didn't happen *in* the hotel—that's something." He looked at me with bright eyes. "Who do you think did it, Colonel? She wasn't exactly popular, was she?"

"Wasn't she?" I said, deliberately chilly. "By the way, do you think I could still get some kind of lunch?"

He pulled his ears back in. "Of course, Colonel."

I'd barely finished coffee when a bellboy said somebody wanted to see me. It was the Inspector from nearby Berne, the national capital. The Inspector was a slim, gray-haired, gray-eyed Swiss named Jaeger, who spoke perfect English. He didn't bother asking me for my story again. He'd read my written

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statement, pumped the local police sergeant dry of all details, and had his own men from Berne fanning out like bird dogs. He came straight to the point.

"I need your help, Colonel Bird," he said. "I understand you've had long experience in criminal work with your Army."

"Only two years," I told him, "and all administrative paperwork."

"I'm sure you're being modest," he said, "but also there is a second reason—"

"I think I can guess it," I said dryly. "I know a good many of the guests here. Besides, I'm perhaps the only person in Grindelwald with an unbreakable alibi."

He laughed and stood up. "I'll get the hotel owner and we'll go up to Miss Warden's room."

Freddy Schmidt ran the elevator himself, up to the third floor, and the awed bellboy on guard stood aside to let him open the door with his passkey.

Jaeger whistled softly. Although I'd seen Rosemary Warden enough to know she was far from poverty-stricken, I was a little surprised myself. Everything in the room was the best; a Texas oil heiress couldn't have done better. I didn't think the tabloid could pay her enough to buy all this.

Freddy Schmidt shed a little light. "Between us," he said, "I gave her this room for half price, and she'd slip the hotel's name into her column now and then. Every American tourist in Europe reads the paper, and a line in her column was worth a page of paid ads."

"But the clothes, the furs, the jewelry," Jaeger said, puzzled.

Schmidt said dryly, "A girl that pretty doesn't have much trouble paying her dressmaker—or even her jeweler."

Only the battered portable typewriter was not new. I picked up some of the typewritten sheets lying near it on the table. One was headed *Footloose—Tuesday.* It looked like a rough draft, something she hadn't yet mailed off, and now never would. I glanced through it swiftly till one paragraph stopped my eyes:

> HANDSOME HARRY, known to the suffering people of Bandore as their Playboy Maharajah, is peddling a few tons of the family jools, with hot bidding from Park Avenue's Pollock & Pender and a rival British house. Harry needs pin money. His new Cockney Maharanee, formerly Gloria Gordon of the Follies (and formerly formerly Sarah Tookham of Cheapside, crikey!) is down to her last pair of solid platinum skis, and hasn't a thing to wear but last week's sables. Price? Try a million minimum. Sorry, no phone orders, no C.O.D.'s.

And on another page I found:

> POOR-BUT-HONEST Tom Caldwell is about to fulfill the Great American Dream and marry the Boss's Daughter. The lucky,

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lucky girl is Leslie Pollock, only daughter of Stanton Pollock, the jewel tycoon. Question: In a case like this who gives who the diamond ring? Probably Daddy can afford it—or can he?

I showed the paper to Jaeger.

"So!" the Inspector said softly, when he had finished reading. He turned to Freddy. "I want to see all these people at once."

The hotel owner shrugged. "I'm afraid you can't, Inspector. They're scattered all over the mountain, skiing. I don't imagine they'll be back until late afternoon, after today's race. Don't you agree, Colonel?"

I nodded. The Inspector glanced at his watch, impatiently. "Well, while I'm waiting, maybe you two can tell me something about the people involved in those items."

He made notes while we talked. I stuck to facts—no gossip, no speculation. Freddy added his details, and I imagine Jaeger's shorthand notes looked something like this:

The Maharajah of Bandore, wealthy Indian prince, recently married his third Maharanee, an English girl once in show business. She, an excellent skier and now technically an Indian national, is skiing for India. They arrived five days ago, last Friday, and have one of the two best suites in the hotel, on the top floor.

Stanton Pollock, American jewel merchant, shares the other top floor suite with his widowed sister, Mrs. Cynthia Currell, in her fifties, and his only daughter, Leslie, about 22. With the Pollock party, but in an adjoining room, is Tom Caldwell, about 30, a Korean veteran, employed in Pollock's firm and engaged to the daughter. Pollock reported his pistol missing this morning. The two women had been at the hotel more than two weeks, but Pollock and Caldwell had arrived on Friday, like the Maharajah and his wife.

"Friday," Jaeger said. "That's the same day the dead girl's passport was renewed by the American Embassy in Berne."

"That's right," Schmidt explained. "It expired some time before that and the police here were after her to get it renewed. She had to go to Berne in person. As a matter of fact, she came back here on the same train with the others. Not that it means anything. It's the best train of the day and connects in Berne with the international train."

The Inspector mused: "Could she have known they were coming on that train—or vice versa?"

"I don't know about the vice versa," I said, "but she was often with Mrs. Currell and her niece and they probably mentioned that Mr. Pollock and his daughter's fiancé were coming."

Jaeger pursed his lips thoughtfully. "They were all on friendly terms? I had gathered nobody liked the Warden girl much."

I picked my words carefully. "She

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was cutting, rude, but amusing, too, if you had a tough skin. Also, she was pretty and American, and in a place like this you're more or less thrown together."

"Any other Americans here?" he asked.

"Only Scott Smithfield and his wife," I said. I explained about the Czech girl married to the American. "They were in the group, too—if you want to call it a group."

He nodded. "Who of all these people were good skiers?"

Freddy Schmidt looked blank, but I remembered the perfect herringbone tracks on the hummock.

I counted them over carefully on my fingers. "The Maharanee and Mrs. Smithfield are the best, of course—both are in the tournament. I suppose the Maharajah is the worst; he boasts he's never skied in his life, although he dresses perfectly for it. Caldwell only started beginners' lessons here, four days ago. Scott Smithfield is so-so. All the Pollocks are very good. Not champions, but they can take any runs around here."

The Inspector made a few more notes, then read over the two gossip items again. "This poor-but-honest Caldwell, as she calls him. He's very lucky to be marrying such a rich girl, isn't he?"

"She exaggerated a little there," I said. "The truth isn't quite so dramatic."

Cynthia Currell had told me about Caldwell. His father had had a good jewelry business in Chicago, but it went downhill when he fell ill. While Tom was overseas, his father died, and the executors accepted a standing offer to merge with Pollock & Pender—with a proviso that Tom would get a position in the larger firm when he left the Army. The merger worked, and he did well, mostly traveling abroad. It had been, in fact, his idea that some of the Indian princes might be hard up for cash and therefore willing to sell some of their fabulous jewels.

"So you see," I finished, "he's not quite a barefoot boy."

"I see." Jaeger frowned. "About this jewel sale item. Why should a man as rich as the Maharajah have to sell his jewels?"

"He blames politics," I said, remembering the tirades I'd heard the Maharajah let off. "Most of the princes have had their incomes cut sharply. To live in the old way they now have to dig into capital, and in India capital means the family jewels."

"The item says an English firm is trying to outbid Pollock for them," the Inspector observed. "Do they have a man here, too?"

"Yes. A man named Blake, Nigel Blake." I anticipated his next question. "He's been here about ten days and can't ski well at all, although he's just graduated from the nursery class. He's about forty-five, I'd say."

"One more thing," Jaeger per-

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sisted. "In this item Miss Warden says something about whether 'Daddy' can afford a diamond ring or not."

I laughed. "If Stanton Pollock can't afford a diamond ring, nobody can."

"But if she didn't mean it in the financial sense," Jaeger went on, "what did she mean? That he couldn't afford to have Caldwell for a son-in-law?"

"As far as I can see," I said, "he's not only pleased with the match, he's delighted."

Jaeger stared at the two gossip items again. "I suppose all of them would be glad these weren't ever published."

"Of course," I said carefully, "but it's a long way from that to a gun. A gun is pretty drastic censorship."

He glanced at his watch. There was still a lot of time before everybody would be back. "I'd like to see that ambush place myself. Do you feel like going up again?"

As we swung up to Bort, together in a chair-lift, I explained my theory. Jaeger listened carefully, saying little, but at Bort he took over. And he spotted something I'd missed.

"Odd," he said. "I wonder where that one-way ski track goes?" He pointed with his ski pole to a flat little open space on the other side of the cableway, entirely surrounded by forest. A pair of tracks went across it, disappearing into the woods.

"You're right," I said. "There's no normal reason for anybody to go there. There's no regular run, not even an old forest road."

"Let's follow it," he said. He was adequate on skis, but not much more. The track entered the woods, then doubled back sharply, nearly to the cableway.

"Somebody has waited here," he said. The snow was cut up as if someone on skis had shifted around. "And waited some time, too." He bent down and picked up a soggy cigarette end, another, and a third. "Or was very nervous."

"Waited for what?" I wondered. "And why here?"

He shrugged. "Well, you can see a lot from here—and not be seen yourself."

It was true. On the very edge of the woods, it had a clear view of the little Bort restaurant terrace, a stone's throw away, plus the lift station at Bort. Downhill, it commanded a good view of the ambush hummock and far below that, the Oberhaus lift station.

"He might have waited here," Jaeger speculated, "until he saw the girl leave Oberhaus down there. He could easily spot her red clothes. And he'd have time to go on down to the hummock and shoot from there."

"Just barely time," I said, "and he'd have to be a crack skier to make it. Besides, why not wait at the hummock itself? He could see just as well from there."

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Jaeger shrugged again. "Let's see where the trail goes from here." He pushed off with his poles, then stopped almost immediately. The track dipped down a slope and soon joined the main trail. But Jaeger was picking something out of the snow, and his eyes were gleaming.

It was a gray ski mitten, right-handed, made of the new stretchy material. As Jaeger pointed out, nobody can smoke with both mittens on. He theorized that the unknown murderer had taken off one mitten and, like most people, tucked it into his belt. Then he had left in a hurry —to ski down and kill the girl—and in the excitement had forgotten the mitten, which had fallen loose.

It sounded plausible. But I was looking at the track the unknown person had made. "Whoever was here, man or woman," I said, "was no expert." I began pointing out the little technical differences that proved it.

The Inspector shook his head. "Too technical for me. I'm no ski expert. Now let's go down to the ambush spot."

Once again I climbed it, with him, and once again we found nothing new—no clue to show who had waited in the concealing spruce.

The beautiful herringbone tracks were still there, untouched. I pointed to them. "I still say that whoever waited up above could never have made a herringbone like that."

Jaeger glanced at me, grinning. "In the police business, Colonel, 'never' is a word I never use."

Back at the Snow Queen Hotel, Jaeger went into high gear with the mitten. He told his men, "Find out everything you can about it: where it was made, where it was sold, everything. Ask the servants in this hotel if they've seen mittens like it in anybody's room. If not, try the other hotels here, all of them."

He asked Freddy Schmidt if the Maharajah was back yet.

"Yes," the hotel owner said. "He and his wife came in about ten minutes ago and went straight up to their suite." He hesitated. "Make it as easy on him as you can, Inspector, will you? We don't get maharajahs every day."

The Maharajah of Bandore, a short dark-skinned man in the most elegant ski clothes money could buy, was not pleased to see us. When I introduced the Inspector, the prince spoke to Jaeger with brusk arrogance. "Well?"

Jaeger was not impressed. He held out the gossip item and said calmly, "Will you be so good, Your Highness, as to tell me if this means anything to you?"

The Maharajah glanced impatiently at the paper, then frowned. "Where did you get this?" he demanded. He seemed angry rather than surprised and Jaeger made a swift deduction, "Then you have seen it before, Your Highness?"

The prince glared. "Yes." From

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the adjoining bedroom the Maharanee walked in, swaying gracefully. She was slender and blonde, somewhat sharp-faced, and a full head taller than her husband. She asked, "What is it, Harry?"

With a grimace he handed her the typewritten sheet, then turned back to Jaeger. "Yes, she showed it to me last night, in the bar. She asked how I liked it . . . if it was accurate . . . whether I'd like any changes! A ruby, a little money, would have erased it fast enough—I know her too well—but I told her to print it and be hanged!"

Jaeger said, "Excuse me, Your Highness. You know she's been killed?"

The Maharajah stared at him. *"Killed!"* he repeated hoarsely.

His wife looked up blankly. "No, we certainly did not know. We came straight up here. We didn't stop to talk to a soul." Her fingers tightened on the typewritten sheet. "I know it's not the time to say it, but she was mean, vicious, evil. Always hounding us. Making fun of the way I talk, making it sound as if being on the stage was as bad as—as—when the girls I worked with were a hundred times more decent than she ever was!" She turned to her husband, her voice rising. "Harry! I don't want to stay here! I want to get away! It's awful!"

Her husband patted her shoulder consolingly. After a tactful pause Jaeger asked the prince, "Do I understand you knew her before?"

"Knew her?" The Maharajah shrugged. "I've *met* her before. She got in everywhere, somehow—Rome, Capri, Paris, Cannes—everywhere. She was amusing, in her way, until one knew her better. Some people asked her because they were afraid of her. She knew too much."

"I believe," Jaeger said in a neutral voice, "that she was on the same train with you last Friday, coming here from Berne."

The Maharajah stared frostily. "On the same train, perhaps, but most certainly not *with us!* Not after the things she's printed about me in the past."

"Did you happen to see her today on the mountain?" Jaeger asked.

"No. My wife raced this morning and did very well. We came down around noon—back to the hotel. We lunched here with Mr. Pollock and his sister."

"At what time, Your Highness?"

"One o'clock. When was—when did it happen?"

"A little after noon," Jaeger told him.

The Maharajah said, "I took the lift down. I don't ski well. My wife, of course, skied down and got here well before me."

Jaeger nodded slowly. "If this gossip item had been published, Your Highness, aside from the personal embarrassment, would it have affected the sale of your jewels in any way?"

"Not in any way I can imagine," the Maharajah said promptly.

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"One last question, please. Have you decided yet whether the American or the British firm will get them?"

"I cannot see," the Maharajah said coldly, "how my private affairs have anything to do with this regrettable incident. However, the answer is no, not yet."

Jaeger had taken over Freddy Schmidt's office and one of his men already had a report on the gray ski mitten. It was not helpful. The mitten was a new model, made by a Zurich firm, but already so popular that half the skiers in Switzerland were using it. It was sold in all ski resorts, including nearly every shop in Grindelwald, and not even the size would help. Thanks to the stretchy material it came in only one size and that fitted practically anybody.

He had his men combing the nearly two dozen hotels in Grindelwald, hoping to find something about Rosemary Warden's movements. It was not so hopeless as it sounded. She had been such a striking beauty that nobody who saw her once was likely to forget her.

The normal who-was-where-when approach was nearly useless. On a ski slope a person could be at one spot one minute and a mile away the next. And with the ski lift he could move up and down freely; the attendants couldn't memorize the thousands of faces that passed them. And in ski clothes people look pretty much alike.

"A pity," Jaeger said gloomily, "that you didn't see the killer yourself. You were nearer than anybody, right up in the air over him."

"A man," I pointed out dryly, "doesn't examine every passing skier with the thought he might be a killer."

"I know." He asked me whom I'd seen at Bort, while waiting for the police. I admitted I'd waved at people, but had been so deep in thought that I'd paid no attention to them and didn't know who they were. "Except Suska Smithfield," I added.

He nodded. "A friend of the Warden girl?"

"Not exactly a friend," I said slowly. Then I stopped. No gossip, I'd promised myself.

"Then an enemy?" he asked curiously.

"It doesn't have to be either one," I pointed out. "By now you know what the Warden girl was like. She had a nasty word for everybody, sometime or other, and she didn't spare Suska, either."

He reached for the phone and asked the front desk. "Are the Smithfields back yet? . . . Where? . . . Oh, Kleine Scheidegg, I see. How about Mr. Pollock? . . . Or Mr. Blake . . . Well, Mr. Caldwell, then . . . Thunder!" He hung up, irritated.

"Your Smithfields," he said, "took the 1:10 train up to Kleine Scheidegg

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to see some people in the hotel there. Nobody else is back yet." He shrugged. "Well, I've got to call Berne."

Down in the lobby I found Freddy Schmidt taking down the bright poster which read: *GALA MOONLIGHT SKI-DOWN.*

"All that work wasted!" he said sadly.

I felt a little sad myself. The Snow Queen's moonlight ski-down each year was a famous tradition, and I'd never been on one. This year's was to have been something special. For one thing, all the hotel guests were to wear fancy dress—a Berne costumer was to bring up enough costumes for everybody. The ski lift, hired for the evening, would haul everybody up to Bort for the ski-down over the easy trails, back to Grindelwald in the moonlight. There was to be hot-spiced wine and peasant dances in a queer old place called the Monk's Hut. Then, around midnight, we were to go back to the hotel for a gala midnight supper, and the presentation of ski prizes for the tournament which ended that day, Friday.

Now the police had banned it. "I suppose they're right," Freddy said glumly. "With a killer running around loose, probably nobody would have gone, anyway."

Behind us a woman's deep voice said, "What a pity, Freddy!"

It was Cynthia Currell, Stanton Pollock's widowed sister. She had a slightly sardonic face, wore smart gray ski clothes, with an outrageous purple ski cap, and looked considerably younger than her fifties.

"And," she was saying, "I don't think I'll have my cocktail party in the lounge tonight, Freddy. Not very good taste, now that . . ." Then she drawled, "Still, it can't hurt if we all come up to our suite instead." Her cocktail party was to return one the Maharajah had given two days before. She turned to me. "Does that suit you, Eagle?"

I winced. Because of my last name, Bird, and my colonel's insignia, she insisted on calling me "Eagle."

"Although," she said, looking at me sharply, "I understand it's not Eagle any more, now that you're playing with the police. I suppose it's Bloodhound, isn't it? However, you can still come for a drink tonight. But don't be a spy, or a stool pigeon, or whatever they call it."

Jaegar sent for me again. "Sorry to bother you, but this Caldwell has come back. He'll be down in a minute."

Caldwell was lean, wiry, darkly handsome—and on guard. He seemed surprised to see me, and grinned. "Glad you're here, Colonel. At least, I'll have a friend on the jury. I hope."

He settled into a chair. Jaeger surprised both of us by saying sternly, with no preliminaries, "I understand, Mr. Caldwell, that you

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had a quarrel with Miss Warden in the bar last night, a very bitter quarrel."

Caldwell jerked upright, flushing. "Where did you hear that?" he demanded.

"And that you warned her," the Inspector went on without replying, "that if she ever did something again, you'd—just what did you threaten to do?"

I'd been in the bar myself last night and hadn't noticed anything. I waited for Caldwell to deny it. Instead, he looked down at the floor, then turned suddenly to me.

"You know how she was, Colonel. You must have heard some of the cracks she made about Leslie and me. Hinting I was marrying her just for the money. Well, she was at it again last night. She called me—Cinderella boy!" His mouth tightened. "I got sick of it. I didn't want to make a scene. I got her off where I thought nobody could see us or hear us. I told her she'd have to quit it, or . . ." He stopped.

"Or what?" Jaeger prompted softly.

Caldwell made a tired gesture. "I don't know, don't remember. I was furious." He gave a crooked half grin. "Sure, I know what you think. Man threatens girl. Girl is killed next day. So man killed girl. Well, I didn't. I didn't like her. Nobody liked her. But that's not enough to pin her murder on me."

Jaeger examined him for a long moment, then held out the gossip item. "I suppose her talk was something like this?"

Caldwell read it with growing anger. "Poor-but-honest Tom Caldwell!" he gritted. He handed back the sheet, his eyes blazing. "Yes, like that."

"I suppose," Jaeger said mildly, "you're glad that was never published."

"Would you expect me to like it?" Caldwell demanded sarcastically.

Jaeger asked, "Where were you around noon today?"

"Up in the nursery school," Caldwell said tightly, "trying to learn how to ski. You can check that with the instructor and the other dozen dubs there. It stopped a little before twelve. Then I skied down to the ski lift station. I fell four times, but I'm afraid you can't check that. I took the lift up, all the way to First, and had lunch there with Miss Pollock. Check it all!"

"We will," Jaeger said thinly. "I believe you have a pistol."

"Of course. A .375 Magnum exactly like Mr. Pollock's. You want to see it?"

"Please." Jaeger nodded. Caldwell went off to get it, and the Inspector examined a big wall map which showed the entire Grindelwald area in great detail. "Where's the nursery ski school?" he asked me.

"Here," I said, pointing to a spot just outside of Grindelwald.

"A long way down the mountain from that hummock." He squinted at the map thoughtfully.

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"Of course, even if he did take the lift from Grindelwald, as he says, he could have got off at Bort and waited in the woods there until he saw her coming up. Then skied to the hummock, shot her, and gone on down to the Oberhaus station and taken the lift back up again—all the way to First, this time, for lunch with the girl."

I laughed. "Yes, he could have done that—and I think that for a skier of his ability it would take him about twelve hours. If he could ever get up that steep hummock at all, which I doubt, he couldn't do it with such a beautiful herringbone."

Caldwell returned and dropped his pistol on the desk. "There!" he said, flushed. "You'll probably find it's covered with my fingerprints, too." And he left.

I nodded at the Inspector. "Nice work, finding out about that quarrel."

He shrugged. "Routine. Hotel work is pretty easy. Maids, waiters, barmen—they all keep their eyes and ears open. It was the barman this time." Then he looked at me, almost reproachfully. "I found out something else, too—that the Warden girl was having a pretty warm affair with Smithfield, that Czech girl's husband. You didn't know about that, did you, Colonel?"

I said uncomfortably, "I suppose I did, but I'll leave the gossip to somebody else."

"Gossip! Sometimes it is very useful to a policeman, Colonel."

He phoned the front desk and learned that Nigel Blake was not back yet. "Odd," he mused. Normally, around dusk, skiers flock back to their hotels like a bunch of homing pigeons, and it was already dark.

"The Pollocks may be back," I said. "At least Mrs. Currell is." He asked me to ring their suite.

Cynthia answered the phone. "What?" she demanded incredulously. "Would we mind stepping down for a moment! I most certainly *would* mind, my dear Eagle. If you and your brother bloodhound want to see us, you'll have to come up here."

She hung up abruptly. When I told Jaeger what she'd said, he began to get red in the face, then laughed. "All right. The queen commands!"

I was used to Cynthia's ways, but Jaeger goggled when we got to the suite. Perhaps because familiarity breeds contempt, she was incredibly careless with her jewels. Jaeger stared at a heavy gold bracelet on a coffee table, at an enormous diamond ring near it, at a diamond-studded wrist watch on the mantelpiece that would have supported his own family for probably five years. Two magnificent mink coats, hers and Leslie's, were tossed carelessly on the sofa.

Cynthia swept out of her bedroom. "I suppose," she said dra-

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manically, "you're like all policemen and want to know about enemies. That girl had nothing *but* enemies. Dozens, hundreds, perhaps thousands would have killed her gladly. Except, of course, for a certain social prejudice against murder, and . . . But I suppose you want to ask questions."

Jaeger, an amused sparkle in his eyes, dutifully asked her where she had been, and so forth. She had, she said, made a couple of runs during the morning, watched the race, then come back to the hotel for lunch with her brother, the Maharajah, and his wife.

"Lunch was at one," she said, "so I suppose I was around Bort nearly at the time the girl was killed. But I saw nothing . . . well, nothing unusual. Not a thing."

"Your brother skied down with you?" Jaeger asked casually

She gave him a cool look. "No, he came down by himself."

"And your niece?"

Cynthia said tartly, "She's old enough to speak for herself. Leslie!"

"Oh, don't shout so, Aunt Cee!" Leslie Pollock said, coming from the room she shared with Cynthia. She was a slender brunette with a pert nose, a generous mouth and, usually, a clear, happy expression. Now she seemed out of sorts and withdrawn. She said she had skied between First and Bort all morning, mostly alone, and was vague about the times.

"But," Jaeger asked, "Mr. Caldwell joined you for lunch about 12:30 at First?"

She shrugged. "I suppose it was about then," she said.

Stanton Pollock walked in, a prosperous-looking man, his hair touched with gray. His eyebrows lifted as he saw us. I explained, and he said, "Perhaps we'd better go into my bedroom to talk." As he shut the door, Cynthia's face looked strangely tense and thoughtful.

Again Jaeger wasted no time. He showed Pollock the gossip items and watched carefully as he read them. A vein began to pound angrily at Pollock's temple.

He said, "No, I hadn't seen them before, but I'm glad they weren't published. They're scurrilous and vicious, like most of the stuff she wrote!"

"If they had been published," Jaeger asked, "would it have hurt your chances of buying the jewels?"

Pollock stared. "I can't see how." Then, frowning: "Of course, if Bandore ever thought I'd had anything to do with that item about him, he'd see me dead before selling to me." He looked up. "Not that I did, naturally. I'm just speculating."

The Inspector nodded thoughtfully. "This other item, Mr. Pollock, seems to hint that you might not have approved of your daughter's engagement to Mr. Caldwell."

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The jewel merchant gave him a long, steady look. "I'm not sure," he said with dignity, "how far, in your country, a policeman is entitled to go into such personal matters. However, let me say this, and say it once and for all. I am delighted with the match. I've no son of my own to take over the firm. I'm very lucky to get a son-in-law who knows the jewel business from the ground up—a man of intelligence and integrity, whom my daughter loves."

Jaeger looked slightly abashed. "You understand, sir, that I had to ask—just as I now must ask about the missing pistol."

"Yes," Pollock said, "I feel like a complete fool about that. I've carried a pistol for years and never lost one until now."

"And yet," the Inspector went on, a smile taking the sting from his words, "you apparently left it under a pile of shirts in your drawer, without locking either the drawer or your doors."

Pollock looked sheepish. "It sounds childish, I admit. But who ever locks doors in a ski resort—or would dream of being robbed in Switzerland?"

Jaeger grinned. "I accept the compliment to Swiss honesty." Then he looked grave. "You see, sir, I assume it was your gun that killed Miss Warden. I assume the killer, like most people, would know that you people in the jewelry business—you and Mr. Caldwell and Mr. Blake—would probably have pistols. By the way, where are the Maharajah's jewels now? In the hotel safe?"

"Good heavens, no!" Pollock laughed. "In a bank vault in Berne."

That seemed to end the questioning for the day. Nigel Blake had still not come in, and I wasn't sorry. I was getting a little tired and went out for a walk, to clear my head.

It was a wonderful night, the air crisp, the Alps white and fairy-like under the moon. I strolled slowly through the little main street of Grindelwald and out the other side of town.

Gay accordion music swirled out of the Monk's Hut, where we were to have gone Friday night to see peasant dances, before the moonlight ski-down was canceled. It was the oldest building in Grindelwald, made of heavy gray stone, its slate roofs thick with 400 years of moss. It had once actually been part of a monastery; now it was a popular local night spot.

I looked in at the gable windows and saw Nigel Blake alone at a table. I hesitated a moment, then walked in and straight to his table.

"Oh, hello, Bird!" he said, looking up at me. "Take a chair. You've found me in my favorite den. Give me a good beer and an accordion any day." He signaled a waiter to

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bring me a beer. Then he said calmly, "Pity about Rosemary Warden."

"Yes," I said, studying him. He seemed in an odd mood, more than usually jerky in his talk. He was dark, saturnine, cynically witty. He'd been a lieutenant colonel like myself in North Africa, but had been with Montgomery as a gunner while I'd been with our Second Corps, in tanks. We'd had a lot to talk about.

Now he asked idly, "Do the police have any ideas?"

"A policeman," I said, "never admits it even if he doesn't. I used to be one myself, in a way." I explained my C.I.D. posting and that I was now working with the Swiss Inspector.

"Good heavens," he grinned. "You riding with the hounds! Am I to be broken on the inquisitor's wheel, too?"

"Why should you?" I said.

"Touché!" he laughed, looking down into his glass. Then: "I suppose you're going to Cynthia Currell's do tonight?"

I nodded. "But it's been changed. Up in her suite, not down in the lounge."

"Trust Cynthia!" He chuckled. "Very correct. Well, we'd best be off and change, I suppose." He tossed some silver coins on the table and we left.

We walked along together, the crisp snow crunching under our ski boots. Then he said suddenly, "I've often wondered what the police ask at a time like this. Where was I when the fatal shot was fired? Did I know whether she had any enemies? Did I kill her myself? That sort of thing?"

"More or less," I said, glancing sideways at him. His face did not seem as light as his words.

"Well, somebody in the bar back there said she was killed a bit past noon. At that time I was trying very hard to ski down from Bort to Grindelwald, giving myself a minimum of three tumbles. I did it, too, thus setting a new record for me. As for enemies, she had heaps of them, of course. Not including me. And no, I didn't kill her." His face was dark in the moonlight.

"The Inspector has been asking for you," I said. "If you want to get it over with . . ."

He repeated about the same things to Jaeger. When the Inspector asked about the jewel sale Blake said, "Certainly my people would love to get them. But the final decision is up to the Maharajah, of course. We can offer only sterling, and some people have a nasty habit of preferring dollars. Still, there are ways of working that, too."

Our visit to Jaeger made both Blake and me a little late at Cynthia's. Everybody was there when we arrived except the Smithfields. I'd been afraid it would be a heavy and strained affair, but I was very much mistaken.

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Cynthia Currell met us, and cried, "Here are just the men to settle it! We're arguing, Eagle, whether men look better in uniform or in civvies."

"And I say," Leslie Pollock insisted brightly, "that uniforms have it all over civvies." She stood up, smiling. "Wait a minute!" She dashed into her bedroom and was back in an instant with a large photograph of Tom Caldwell, in a heavy gold Pollock & Pender frame. She set it on the fireplace mantelpiece.

"Now look at this," she said gaily "and look at him now. Is there any comparison?"

Tom Caldwell groaned and I shook my head in sympathy. It was a photograph in the grim do-or-die pose that most young officers can't resist. I know, for I'd succumbed myself, long ago. Caldwell was looking sternly into the camera, above a formidable display of ribbons. On one shoulder, as I realized later, was the insignia of the 13th Mountain Division, and there was no doubt Tom Caldwell was a handsome young man in his service uniform.

"Nice mess of fruit salad," I said. "Silver Star, too."

He seemed to color with embarrassment or pleasure, maybe both, and gave the standard answer about how decorations came up with the rations.

The British-born Maharanee of Bandore said in a low voice, "I *hate* uniforms!" There was a sudden silence. "I had two brothers who died —in uniform." She shivered and looked up with a wry smile. "Sorry to be a wet blanket. But give me a good loud sports jacket on a man any day."

Cynthia Currell tactfully steered the talk to a safe subject that most people in the room would know about—jewels. "Tell me," she asked the Maharajah, "if there's anything to the stories about India I used to read as a girl—how some blasphemous foreigners stole a ruby from an idol's head, and then silent men followed them to the ends of the earth and killed them?"

The Maharajah chuckled. "I've read those stories, too, Mrs. Currell, but only in the West." An odd smile crossed his face. "Yet strange things do happen with jewels. An ancester of mine, for example, once had a wife who was so fond of jewels that she accepted them from—the wrong men. There was no greater crime in those days and of course he had her executed. But in rather a novel way. Her throat was cut with a knife he had specially made —the blade was one great emerald, sharpened."

He smiled pleasantly. "Times change, of course." He glanced affectionately toward his wife, who colored slightly and smiled back rather weakly.

When silence fell again, I tried to help out. "Tell me," I said to the Maharajah. "I thought jewels were usually sold at public auction. I

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hope it's not indiscreet to ask why you prefer a private sale?"

His eyebrows went up and I realized that perhaps it *was* an indiscreet question. Stanton Pollock, Caldwell, and Blake—all of them seemed to stiffen, and I caught Cynthia Currell's exasperated look, her eyes raised to the ceiling.

The Maharajah looked at me with an enigmatic smile. "Are you asking now, Colonel, as a detective —or as a fellow guest?"

I felt myself reddening. "I'm not really asking at all—" I began.

But the Maharajah made a slight gesture with his plump hand. "As a matter of fact, Colonel, I have no objection to explaining why. Frankly, I have very little confidence in auctions. They can be rigged too easily against the seller. The bidders in such a sale, you see, are so few that they can get together and agree to keep the prices low." His eyes strayed from Stanton Pollock to Nigel Blake. "So I prefer," he went on, "to make private negotiations with sound, reputable well-known houses."

Both Pollock and Blake nodded, smiling, then Blake said, "I think you're wise, sir. But I must point out that auctions can be rigged the other way, too—with a dummy bidder pushing the price up, never intending to buy at all, but spurring on a real buyer who gets carried away by the excitement."

Tom Caldwell gave a short, sudden laugh. "You're telling me! I was one of the suckers that got pushed up—at the Karinoff jewel auction in Cairo two years ago."

Blake looked at him with sudden curiosity. "So that was you, was it? We heard something about that sale, but didn't know who was fleeced."

The Maharajah was looking puzzled. "Please, I do not understand."

Caldwell looked uncomfortable. "I didn't at the time, either," he said wryly. "I was new in that part of the world. The bidding was very lively, and before I knew it was way up high, a good deal above what the gems were really worth. Then suddenly the bidding stopped dead, and there I was—stuck." He added sheepishly, "We found out enough later to be pretty sure it was a put-up job, with dummies bidding and probably splitting with the auctioneer or owner later."

Stanton Pollock came to his rescue. "Well, it cost us a pretty penny, but everybody makes his mistakes. in the beginning. At least it taught Tom to be careful."

There was a moment's silence in which I felt some hidden tension I couldn't understand. The phone rang and Cynthia answered it. "Suska! What is it, dear? . . . Oh, that's quite all right, don't give it a thought . . . You've heard about Rosemary Warden, I suppose . . . Yes, isn't it? Well, see you tomorrow." She hung up.

"The Smithfields won't be com-

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ing tonight," she said. "They missed the train down from Kleine Scheidegg and can't get here till the next one, which is quite late."

With her short laugh the Maharanee said, "Suska's heart must have been broken when she heard about poor Rosemary."

Her husband glanced at her, annoyed. And Cynthia Currell said frostily, "I think that the less said the better. For the sake of discretion, if not of kindness."

The temperature in the suite seemed suddenly to drop to zero. Then Cynthia smiled, became the hostess again, and the talk turned into safer channels. The party broke up when the dinner gong sounded. Cynthia kept me behind for a moment.

"I suppose," she said, "that you got enough to fill all your dossiers, or whatever they are?" She spoke lightly, but there was a strange warning light in her eyes.

I didn't know what to say except, "Good night, Cynthia, and thanks."

I had dinner alone and went to bed early.

I was dreaming of the First Armored Division's approach to Ferryville in Tunisia. From the high ground around the lake the German .88's were throwing shells at us . . . I came awake groggily. Somebody was pounding on my door. I snapped on the light. My watch said 2:04 A.M. I threw on a robe and opened the door.

It was Jaeger. "Come!" he said abruptly. "Somebody has tried to rob the Pollocks!"

Nearly everyone else was already there, in dressing gowns, staring and whispering. Freddy Schmidt looked gray. Cynthia Currell, unfamiliar in hair curlers, looked bushed. Still irritable with sleep, I demanded, "What in thunder happened?"

"Oh, nothing at all!" she said soothingly. "Except that with this hotel fairly bulging with policemen someone tried to burgle us!"

Leslie Pollock, charming in a pale blue satin gown, broke in excitedly, "I woke up and heard a noise, Colonel—from out here in the sitting room. I woke up Aunt Cee, and she heard it, too. She tried to whisper to the telephone operator but the girl couldn't understand her and she had to speak louder. So I got a bright idea to cover up her voice on the phone. I rattled the knob of our bedroom door, loud. It was locked, of course, and quite safe, although—" She looked up suddenly. "He might have shot through the door, mightn't he? Anyway, the noise I made scared him away and he went off and didn't get anything. Not a thing! And with all that lying right out in the open!"

She gestured. As usual, Cynthia Currell had left jewels around where she had dropped them. The heavy gold photograph frame was still on

(continued on page 93)

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EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHORS: **Frances & Richard LOCKRIDGE**

TITLE: ***If They Give Him Time***

TYPE: Detective Story

DETECTIVE: Captain Heimrich, State Police

LOCALE: Westchester County, New York

TIME: The Present

COMMENTS: *Young Ned had quarreled with his father about Ned's wife of only three weeks—but the crucial point in the case was time. Would they give young Ned time?*

BEYOND THE OPEN CASEMENT WINdows of the Myron Drake house in Oak Hill, the night breathed softly, slowly, of heavy air. The shrill, endlessly repeated notes of a whippoorwill's cry slashed through the sound of the dog-day cicadas.

Captain M. L. Heimrich, New York State Police, said, "Thank you, Mr. Burnett," to a stocky man in his mid-forties. "We appreciate your help."

Jason Brunett stood up. He hesitated. "I hope this doesn' get the boy in trouble," he said. "But—I hadn't any alternative." He still hesitated—waited, Heimrich realized, to be reassured.

"No alternative," Heimrich said, giving him the answer he waited for. "Nothing else you could do, naturally. Not when it's murder."

Burnett nodded his head slowly, unhappily. He walked across the living room toward the door. He limped rather badly. "By the way," Heimrich said, "do you mind waiting while we talk to the boy?"

Burnett shook his head and limped to the door.

"All right," Heimrich said to Sergeant Charles Forniss. "We'll talk to the boy, now." Forniss went into another room and came back with Ned Drake, who had found his father murdered some two hours before. Or said he had. He

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had quarreled violently with his father earlier in the evening. Or Jason Burnett, who had been his father's business partner, said he had. Burnett said he had been out in the kitchen making himself a drink and had stayed during the entire quarrel. That was what he felt he had to tell.

Ned Drake had soft, pale hair which seemed to shine in the lamplight. His lips twitched a little. A boy still, Heimrich thought—a boy for all that he was 21, and a husband of three weeks. A slender, nervous, good-looking boy.

"Tell me what happened," Heimrich said. "Beginning with this quarrel you had with your father, this quarrel about your wife. At a little after eight this evening, Mr. Burnett says it was."

The boy sat down. He put slender hands in front of his face, as if light hurt his eyes. He nodded his head, slowly, his face still screened.

"Dad was dead when I got here," Ned Drake said. "Lying on the floor with his head—" He did not finish; a long shudder ran through his slim body.

Heimrich waited, knowing what the slug from a .45 can do to the human head. After a time, he prompted. "The quarrel, Mr. Drake? About your wife?"

"Dad said she was no good," the boy said. "After money. Nothing else. That wasn't true. Not about Doris. She's . . ." But he did not finish.

It took time, patience. The quarrel was not denied. Perhaps he had blown up a little, the boy admitted. Not because of what his father threatened, which was to cut off his allowance if he didn't leave the girl. But because of what Myron Drake had said to his son about the girl. "Nasty things," the boy said. "I told him what he could do with his money . . ."

But again he trailed off. Heimrich gave him more time.

Ned Drake had told his father what he could do with the money, and had gone back to the Old Stone Inn in Van Brunt to tell his new wife—his 18-year-old wife—what had come of it. And he had found his wife gone, packed up and gone. He had telephoned a few places. Then he had walked back from the inn to his father's house. He had got there about eleven and found his father dead. That was all he knew.

"Why did you come back?" Heimrich asked. "To tell your father he was right, after all? That you'd take the money and let the lady go? Since she had gone in any case?"

Heimrich watched the boy. He should flare at that. Ned Drake did not flare. A licked boy, Heimrich thought.

"Or—to pay him off?" Heimrich said. "Was that it? Because you hated him for being right? Killed him for being right?"

"He was dead when I got here,"

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the boy said. "Didn't somebody say he was shot at a quarter of eleven? Didn't somebody say that? I was a mile from here then."

There was no doubt that Myron Drake had been shot at a quarter of eleven. A good many living in the Oak Hill development—a place of trees and curving roads and bright new houses, each on its own two acres—had heard the shot. Several had looked at their clocks.

A man named Harry Simpkins, Jason Burnett's next door neighbor, had been walking his dog and had heard the shot plainly, had looked at his watch and could swear to the time. Every night at 10:30 he took the dog out and walked him for half an hour. "Like clockwork," Harry Simpkins said. "You can set your watch by me and old Duke." The shot had sounded at 10:45.

But nobody, except the boy himself, could swear that Ned Drake had been a mile away when his father died, and not in the room with a gun—Myron Drake's own gun, it had been—in his hand and hatred in his heart.

"Damn it!" the boy said, with sudden violence. "He was dead when I got here, I tell you—"

But Sergeant Forniss stood in a doorway and the boy stopped. "Yes, Charlie?" Heimrich said, and Forniss said, "The girl's here, captain. Mrs. Drake."

"No!" Ned Drake said. "Don't drag her—"

"All right, Charlie," Heimrich said. "Ask Mrs. Drake to come in."

She came in. Heimrich had supposed she would be pretty, and she was pretty. She had dark red hair; she was delicately made, as the boy was. But she seemed, standing in the room, to be made of silver wire. And that Heimrich had not expected.

"What are they doing to you?" she said to the boy, to her husband. But she spoke as to a boy. He looked up at her.

"You came back," he said, "or—they brought you back. That was it, wasn't it?"

She looked at him, and shook her head a little. She turned to Heimrich and turned (Heimrich thought) as one adult to another. But she was 18 and her face was very young. "What are you doing to him?" she said to Heimrich.

"Asking him questions," Heimrich said. "About murder. But you know that, Mrs. Drake."

"You're crazy," she said. She did not speak with the accents of the Hudson Valley, as the boy did. That would have made a difference to Myron Drake, Heimrich supposed. "He was with me," the girl said. "In our room." She was very young, very defiant.

Heimrich closed his eyes for a moment and shook his head. She looked at the boy. She said, "Didn't you tell him that?"

"It's no good, Doris," the boy said, and spoke in a dull voice. "I

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didn't kill Dad. But he knows we weren't together."

She looked at Heimrich. Her eyes were as blue as Heimrich's. There seemed to be fire behind them.

"Yes," Heimrich said. "Your husband says he went back from here to the inn at about nine, or a little after, and found you gone. He tried to find you and then walked back here. But you say he was with you?"

"That's no good, is it?" the girl said, with odd acceptance. But she wasn't licked—not she. "Worth trying, was all."

"Yes," Heimrich said.

"Oh," the girl said. "I don't blame you. Not you. Only, he couldn't kill anybody. His father would say, 'Put it down son,' and he'd put it down. Put *anything* down." She was bitter, with that.

The boy said, "Doris—"

She made a gesture. It was as if, in words, she told him to keep out of this.

"Mr. Burnett," she said suddenly. "You've thought about Mr. Burnett?"

"Why?" Heimrich said. (He had, and it had got him nowhere.) "Why Mr. Burnett?"

The girl looked at Ned Drake. Her eyes demanded.

"Mr. Burnett and Dad were insured in each other's favor," the boy said. "I suppose she means that."

"Well?" the girl said to Heimrich.

Heimrich shook his head. "Mr. Burnett was at home," he said. "In his kitchen. Getting himself a snack, he says."

"He says," the girl repeated, but Heimrich shook his head again. It was more than that. Burnett had been seen there, or as good as seen. By the man named Simpkins—the man walking his dog, as he did every night.

Simpkins had just stepped onto his terrace when a light went on in Burnett's kitchen. And it was 10:30 then. He could swear to that time, and to the time of the shot, fifteen minues later. And he could swear that the light in Burnett's kitchen went off five minutes after the shot. Simpkins had thought somebody was shooting at a woodchuck, at first.

"In the middle of the night," the girl said, with derision.

Simpkins had remembered that woodchucks hole up at night—remembered that later. Then he had gone to Burnett's to see what Burnett made of it. There was no one there. Burnett, who lived alone in the house, had heard the shot, too—heard it, he said, while he was in the kitchen, in pajamas, a glass of milk in his hand. He had not thought of woodchucks, but of a quarrel in a house half a mile away—a quarrel and a boy's violent words.

Burnett had dressed and walked slowly to Drake's house—walked because his car was in a service

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garage for a tune-up; walked slowly because that was the only way he had to walk. The police had got there before he did, but not by much.

"Somebody else, then," the girl said. "Not Ned. Somebody who broke in?"

"Perhaps," Heimrich said. (But there was nothing to indicate anybody had broken in, or tried to.) "All right," he said. "We'll go on with it tomorrow." He looked at his watch. "Later today," he said. They were surprised, which was all right with Heimrich. It was to be supposed that, left to it, they would put their heads together. Heimrich is a man who prizes efforts by suspects to embellish. He left them to it.

Jason Burnett had waited. He was sitting in a deck chair on the terrace. Heimrich went across the terrace and Burnett stood up and said, "You didn't need me?"

"No," Heimrich said. "It was the way you said."

"The kid?" Burnett said, and there was distress in his voice. "I hoped he'd—" Burnett did not finish. Heimrich said it looked like the kid. Burnett's shoulders slumped. He took a few limping steps.

"I'll run you home," Heimrich said.

It was only minutes in a police car to the neat, small—but very modern—house Jason Burnett lived in, and had lived alone in since his wife died. "A nightcap?" Burnett said, when the car stopped. Heimrich hesitated, decided he could do with something long and cold.

Burnett turned on lights and limped across the living room to the kitchen. Heimrich went along.

The kitchen shone very white. Heimrich looked around it while Burnett got ice from a big refrigerator. A lot of equipment for a man living alone—freezer and electric range, dishwasher, automatic laundry. "I've got the place on the market," Burnett said. "Not much good to me—not now."

There was a wide window over the range. Heimrich looked out into darkness.

"Wouldn't think the Simpkins' were so close, would you?" Burnett said, standing beside him. "A good thing for me they are, isn't it?" He looked at Heimrich. "And," he said, "that Harry was walking his dog just then." He smiled faintly and sipped his drink. "Might have got ideas otherwise, mightn't you?"

"Now, Mr. Burnett," Heimrich said, and put his drink down on the convenient range. "You're thinking of the insurance—" And then he stopped, and leaned down, and Burnett looked at him curiously.

"Cooking something tonight, Mr. Burnett?" Heimrich said. "Not this morning, obviously. You were in the city this morning. At—" He leaned down and looked again at the many dials and buttons of the automatic range. "At about ten minutes of eleven?"

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Heimrich did not look at Burnett. Only at the range.

"To be finished cooking at ten of eleven," Heimrich said. "After cooking twenty minutes. It's set that way. To go on, then, at 10:30. And —not the oven. Not one of the top burners." He pointed at the row of buttons which selected the unit to be used automatically. "The outlet," Heimrich said, and pointed at the one he meant—the plug-in receptacle in the headboard of the range; the one marked "Auto."

"Making coffee tonight, Mr. Burnett? Or—*turning on a light?* A lamp plugged into the outlet? To go on at 10:30, when Mr. Simpkins walks his dog every night? Like clockwork, he says. And, off at ten to eleven, with your partner dead? How much is the insurance, Mr. Burnett?"

Burnett stared at the stove—not at Heimrich. At the stove.

"Yes," Heimrich said. "We all make mistakes. Forgot to reset it, didn't you? Put the lamp back where you got it, naturally. But forgot all about the stove controls." He made a sound with tongue and teeth, a sound almost of sympathy. Then he said he'd use Mr. Burnett's telephone, if Mr. Burnett didn't mind. And Burnett began to swear and seemed, absurdly enough, to be swearing at an automatic electric range.

Jason Burnett was on his way to Carmel, County of Putnam, State of New York, and conversation with an assistant district attorney. Heimrich would join them there, but first there was a message to be delivered. He walked across the grass toward the Drake house, where windows stood open and lights still burned.

He could not see the boy and girl inside the living room, but he could hear them clearly.

"—whatever you're told," the girl said. "Like a child. Your father says, 'Cut off the money and watch her go. The little gold digger.' Oh, I don't know the words. Not the words he'd use. Very smooth words, probably. And you—"

"Please, Doris," the boy said. "Please listen to me."

"What I'm like," she said. "You wouldn't know that, would you? Just what papa tells you. 'Yes, papa.' 'I guess she is, papa.' Like a little boy. Like a little, *little* boy."

"You left. Took your things."

"Baby," she said. "Oh—baby." There was something near a sob in her young voice. "You thought," she said, "that I'd just wait there to be told? That I didn't know already? Know that whatever papa said—" She broke off. It was easy to guess why. "No," the girl said. "That's not enough, Ned. Not now. Come back—come back when you grow up." There was another moment and then, again, she said, "No, Ned," and then, "Oh, I love you. Damn it and damn it. But—when you grow up."

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It was seconds before Ned Drake spoke, and then he spoke, slowly, in a voice Heimrich had not heard him use before. "All right," Ned Drake said. "I'll—I'll try, Doris. If they let me. If they give me time."

Heimrich scuffled his feet on the flagstones and knocked, so that he could go in and tell a boy that time was his, for all "they" had to do with it. Heimrich found himself hoping, and rather believing, the boy would use it well—with the girl to help. There had to be something to a boy who would pick a girl like that. It would be interesting, Heimrich thought, to see which of them came to open the door to him, not knowing yet what was to be faced.

Ned Drake opened the door. He stood straight and looked at Heimrich steadily, and waited.

Heimrich smiled, nodded his head a little, and then told Ned Drake what he had come to tell him.

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EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR: **LLOYD BIGGLE, JR.**

TITLE: ***Grandfather & the Gentle Swindler***

TYPE: Small Town Story

LOCALE: Borgville, Michigan

TIME: The Present

COMMENTS: *Folks in Borgville usually don't give things "on condition"—so when the stranger in town offered something for nothing, Sheriff Pilkins was naturally suspicious . . .*

I FIRST SAW THIS MR. ALLEN ONE afternoon last August when Grandfather and I came back from town and found a snappy convertible parked in front of our house and a stranger on the front porch. He'd made himself comfortable in Grandfather's favorite glider and he was sitting there as if he owned the place.

He smiled and said, "Howdy."

Grandfather didn't say anything. He tore back through the house to the kitchen where he found Mom talking with Mrs. Pobloch.

"Who the tarnation is that?" he yelled.

"Hush," Mom said. "That's Mr. Allen. I met him in Dimmit's Grocery Store and he was looking for a place to stay, so I rented him the front bedroom."

"Tarnation!" Grandfather said.

"Hush," Mom said. "It's only for one week and he's paying me ten dollars. He won't be any trouble."

But Grandfather was plenty mad. He glared at Mrs. Pobloch as if she maybe had something to do with it. "No trouble! He looks like a confidence man!"

He stomped up to his room and I heard his rocking chair start up. You can always tell how Grandfather feels by the way he rocks, and that day I thought he'd tear holes in the rug.

Of course Mrs. Pobloch told someone what Grandfather had said, and one thing led to another, and that evening right after supper, Sheriff Pilkins showed up.

"I heard," he said to Grandfather, "that you have a confidence man staying with you."

I think right at that moment

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Grandfather changed his mind about Mr. Allen. When Grandfather sees Sheriff Pilkins he's likely to forget anything else he might be mad about. In the twenty-five years the sheriff has been running for office Grandfather is the only adult in Borgville who has never voted for him, and the sheriff knows it. "I suppose you got nothing better to do than listen to gossip," Grandfather said. "You'll catch a lot of criminals that way."

The sheriff walked over to the front window. Mr. Allen had gone down to eat supper at the Star Restaurant and was just getting back.

"Good-looking fellow," the sheriff said. "He'll give these single girls something to think about."

"He won't give them anything new to think about," Grandfather said.

"Walks kind of funny, doesn't he?"

"It's none of the law's business, the way a man walks."

"Borgville isn't no health resort," the sheriff said. "A man wouldn't plunk himself down here for a week just for the fun of it. I better have a talk with him."

The sheriff went out on the porch and introduced himself. "What's your business?" he said.

"Manufacturer's agent," Mr. Allen said. "But the grind gets me down every now and then and I like to take a few days off. This is a fine little town. Quiet. It feels good to breathe fresh air for a change."

"Oh," the sheriff said. "Sure."

They talked a little about the weather, then the sheriff excused himself and came back into the house. "What the devil is a manufacturer's agent?" he whispered.

"It's a fancy name for a salesman," Grandfather said.

"Sounds fishy to me. Everything about this fellow sounds fishy. I'll give you odds he's wanted somewhere."

"He's not wanted here," Grandfather said. "But as long as it's only for a week I'm not saying anything."

"I'll keep an eye on him," the sheriff said. He went out the back way, but when he got around to the street I saw him stop and take a long look at Mr. Allen.

Mr. Allen sure wasn't any trouble. When I got up he'd already been downtown for his breakfast, and now he was sitting on the porch, smoking his pipe. He didn't even complain about Grandfather's snoring, which meant that he was either a sound sleeper or awful polite.

I sat down and talked with him for a while. I liked him right away. He had a soft voice and a kind of shy smile that made his whole face light up. He really was good-looking, and he'd done a lot of traveling to foreign countries, and he sure was interesting to talk to.

After a while he got up and took a look at the sky, which was cloud-

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ed over, and said, "It's cooler than it was yesterday. How about a game of tennis?"

"Tennis?" I said.

"I don't cover much ground these days," he said, "but I like to bat a ball around. How about it?"

"Borgville's got no tennis court," I said. "There was some talk once about building one at school, but nothing ever came of it."

"No tennis court?" he said. He looked at me just about the same way a traveling man did once when I told him Borgville had no liquor store. "You should have a tennis court."

"Yes, sir," I said. "We also should have a bowling alley and a moving picture theater and a skating rink —but we haven't."

He thought about that a while, then he said, "What do you kids do to pass the time?"

"We go fishing," I said. "And we play baseball and do some swimming."

"Where do you swim?" Mr. Allen said.

I told him there were some good swimming holes close to town, like the one in Borgville Creek and in Mr. Grant's quarry.

"Borgville," Mr. Allen said, "should have a swimming pool."

I didn't have anything to say.

"I think I'll take a walk," Mr. Allen said.

I didn't see him again until after lunch when I went uptown with Grandfather. Every afternoon he walks up to borrow the morning paper from Mr. Snubbs, who runs the Snubbs Hardware Store, and if it's a nice day he sits on the bench in front of Jake Palmer's barber shop and reads the day's news. That day we met Mr. Allen coming out of the barber shop and the three of us sat down on the bench together.

I noticed all the men that went by taking a good look at Mr. Allen, since word had gotten around that he was a confidence man, but that was nothing compared with what the women did. First came Margaret Snubbs, who is Mr. Snubbs' sister and who has got close up to forty without being married, partly because she thinks she is too cultured for the men around Borgville, but mostly because the men agree with her. I'll swear she was about to drop her handkerchief right at Mr. Allen's feet when she looked at Grandfather and changed her mind.

And Mrs. Beyers, who is past sixty, had to stop and stare at Mr. Allen, and Miss Phillips, who runs the Town Shop and who is close to forty like Margaret Snubbs, only in the other direction, actually had the nerve to ask me to introduce her. Mr. Allen stood up very politely, and told her yes, he liked Borgville, and no, he was afraid he wouldn't be able to stay long.

It went on like that all afternoon. It seemed half the women in Borg-

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ville had heard Mr. Allen was sitting in front of the barber shop and had to hurry down to see him. He was that good-looking. They all slowed down when they passed us, even Mrs. Walling, who is a war bride from Germany and who has probably not looked at any man but her husband since she got to Borgville, and maybe not even at him, because he treats her like dirt and works her like a hired man. She looked at Mr. Allen so long that her husband got ahead of her and she had to run to catch up. If he'd caught her at it he probably would have beat her when they got home.

After a while Mr. Allen got tired being stared at. He nudged me and said, "Johnny, let's take a walk."

We walked out to the edge of town, which took some time because of that funny limp Mr. Allen had. We stopped at Borgville Park, which is a little patch of weeds beside Borgville Creek, and Mr. Allen walked through the park and stopped at the barbed wire on the other side.

"That tennis court and swimming pool we were talking about," he said. "This would be a good place for it."

"That's Old Man Edwards' pasture," I said. "If you start building a tennis court in there he'll run you out with a shotgun."

"Edwards?" Mr. Allen said. "I'll have to have a talk with him."

We walked back uptown. I left Mr. Allen at Arnell's law office and went over to the barber shop where Grandfather was still reading the paper.

"Mr. Allen is going to build a tennis court and a swimming pool in Edwards' pasture," I told him.

"That," Grandfather said, "is something I would like to live long enough to see."

That evening Mr. Allen had Old Man Edwards to eat with him at the Star Restaurant, and afterwards both of them went over to see Lawyer Arnell. The next morning Mr. Allen and Lawyer Arnell went to talk with Mr. Hansen, who is village president as well as president of the bank, and the whole town was wondering what they were up to.

By afternoon Mr. Hansen had notices up in the bank window and the post office, announcing a public meeting at the High School auditorium, and from the way people turned out you'd thought everyone in Borgville was interested in civic improvements. A lot of farmers came, too, though they had to hurry their chores to get there on time, and Sheriff Pilkins, when he heard Mr. Allen had something to do with it, came and brought four deputies along. Grandfather and I went early and got seats right down in front.

Mr. Hansen started out by introducing Mr. Allen, and then Mr. Allen said a lot of nice things about Borgville and how he liked it and

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wanted to do something for it, and then he said, "I have an option on fifteen acres of the Edwards pasture adjoining Borgville Park. I intend to purchase this land and deed it to Borgville, on the condition that Borgville agrees to build a tennis court and a swimming pool and a baseball field, and maintain the whole as a park."

He sat down and Mr. Hansen let the audience chew that one over among themselves. Folks around me seemed kind of confused. In our part of the country you usually don't give things "on condition," and from the remarks I heard not many people had much of an itch for playing tennis or swimming in a pool.

Mr. Hansen thanked Mr. Allen for his generous offer and said he was sure that interested citizens would donate the necessary labor, but the treasury had no money for the materials and equipment, so the project would have to depend on donations or there wouldn't be any project.

Doc Beyers made a little speech then, saying that outdoor recreation and exercise were good for everyone, and Mr. Grove, who is a farmer from out west of town, got up and said if his boys wanted outdoor recreation and exercise he could give them plenty of it, right on the farm. Jake Palmer got up and said he'd always gotten all the swimming he wanted when he was a boy without any swimming pool, and if the kids were given tennis courts and swimming pools the next things they'd want would be golf courses and TV stations. Quite a few men chimed in along the same line so that it didn't look good for Mr. Allen's idea.

But then the women took over.

Miss Phillips got up. "I think it's a marvelous idea," she said. "It's about time Borgville had a few improvements. I'll donate one hundred dollars."

I heard Jake Palmer say afterwards that she only did it because she stood to sell a lot of swimming suits in her Town Shop if a pool got built, because up until then swimming suits were something we boys mostly got along without. But I don't think Miss Phillips thought about that at the time. She was too busy looking at Mr. Allen.

Anyway, she sure started something.

Margaret Snubbs was on her feet before Miss Phillips sat down and gave away a hundred dollars of her brother's money. Then Doc Beyers tossed in another hundred, though I personally saw Mrs. Beyers kick him first. Mrs. Ferguson, whose husband owns the Borgville Pharmacy, gave two hundred, and Mr. Hansen interrupted to say he'd donate two hundred, and after that the donations came so fast that Mrs. Hansen, who was taking notes, had a hard time getting them all written down.

Every woman there seemed to

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think she had to give something, even Mrs. Walling, who was wearing the same old dress she'd been wearing for years and who looked like she'd just come from pitching hay in the barn, which may have been true. She stood up to say something, but her husband hauled her back down before she could open her mouth, and slapped her face.

But things kept humming until there was over $3,000 in pledges, and the Borgville Improvement Committee had been formed, and a lot of committees were set up to think up ways to raise more money. Mr. Hansen was elected president.

On our way out Sheriff Pilkins stopped Grandfather in the hallway. "Want to talk to you," he said. "Principal's office."

Grandfather went down and I tagged along and got to stay because the sheriff was so excited he didn't even notice me. He had Mr. Hansen there, and a few of the other men, and he said, "Allen has the women in this town hoodwinked, but at least we know what he's up to. Three thousand already and more to come. And when he thinks the pot is big enough he just scoops it up and runs."

"How?" Mr. Hansen said. "The money will be in the bank. No one is going to hand it over to him."

"And who is the treasurer of this here committee?" the sheriff asked.

"Miss Phillips," Mr. Hansen said.

"Ha!" Sheriff Pilkins said. "She's daft about the guy. So is Margaret Snubbs, and she's second vice-president. So are all the women. Even that poor Mrs. Walling went off her nut, and I'll be surprised if there isn't a homicide on that farm by tomorrow morning. Those women would clean out the treasury for Allen any time he asked them."

"No check can be drawn without my signature," Mr. Hansen said. "And I'm not daft about him."

"He'll figure out a way to beat it," the sheriff said. "These con-men know all the angles. This Allen is probably traveling around the country, picking one small town clean after another. It'll take some doing to catch him and I'm going to need all of your help."

Grandfather said, "Hansen, did he actually buy that fifteen acres?"

"Why, no," Mr. Hansen said. "He told us he'd work out the details with Arnell so that the property would be available when we were ready for it."

The sheriff let out a snort. "What'd you expect? This guy is not in the giving-away business. He's in the taking-away business. We'll have to keep our eyes open —or Borgville will be took for plenty."

When I got up the next morning, one of Sheriff Pilkins's deputies was sitting across the street on the Smiths' front porch, keeping his eyes open. He sat there all day, except when Mr. Allen went up-

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town to eat, and then he followed right along.

Outside of that nothing much happened that day. The people who had pledged money at the meeting were wondering how they were going to pay it, and the town was mighty quiet until Miss Phillips started a scandal along about supper time. She met Mr. Allen uptown and invited him to eat with her at her apartment. Somebody heard her, and when it turned out she hadn't invited anyone else, people drew their own conclusions, though Miss Phillips claimed she was going to invite a lot of people if Mr. Allen accepted. Anyway, he turned her down.

The next day was Saturday and when Mom and I got home from shopping Sheriff Pilkins was there, talking with Grandfather. "I'm telling you," Grandfather was saying, "I don't know anything about it."

"I'm going to fire Steve Carling," the sheriff said. "He left his car parked way up the street and when Allen came sneaking out and drove away, he lost him."

"What happened?" I asked.

"Allen went somewhere last night," Grandfather said. "Pilkins wants to know where. I don't know why he thinks *I'd* know. Allen doesn't ask my permission when he wants to go for a ride, and I was sound asleep at the time."

"Yeah," the sheriff said. "Steve said he could hear you snoring clear across the street."

"That's a lie!" Grandfather shouted.

The sheriff apologized and went on, "Allen left about two A.M. and he didn't get back until nearly five. I thought maybe he was calling on one of those dames that's so daft about him, so I had Steve get both of them out of bed. But they hadn't seen him, or at least they said they hadn't. You've got no idea where he went?"

"No," Grandfather said.

"Then tell me this. Who does Allen know so well in this town that he has to be telephoning all the time?"

"It isn't me," Grandfather said.

"He's been making a lot of calls from the booth in the drug store. I thought maybe it was one of those women, but they say no, and each thinks it must be the other, so they're probably telling the truth. I'd be a step closer to figuring out how he's going to grab the money if I knew who he was calling."

"Local calls?" Grandfather said.

"Long distance I could check. Drat these new-fangled dials! Hansen says people are starting to pay off and he's got over a thousand in the committee account already. This darned thing has got me worried."

"Allen says he's leaving tomorrow," Grandfather said.

"Before the whole three thousand is collected? Maybe he will. A thousand wouldn't be bad for a week's work. And if I just knew

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how he was going to get it . . . Well, he won't take any more night rides without me knowing what he's up to. I'll have twenty deputies planted around this town tonight."

I don't know what happened that afternoon because I had a chance to go swimming over at Forbes Lake and I jumped at it. I got home late and Grandfather had already eaten supper and gone away somewhere with Mr. Naylor, who lives next door. The sheriff came by later, wanting Grandfather to help him keep track of Mr. Allen.

"Why don't you take me?" I said. "I know Mr. Allen as well as anybody. I'd be more help than Grandfather would."

"You probably would," the sheriff said. "All right, if your Ma says it's okay."

She didn't, but I talked her into it. I waited in the house until Mr. Allen went up to his room to go to bed, then I walked down to the end of the block where the sheriff had his car parked. It was pretty dark by then and our one street light didn't help much.

"He's just gone to bed," I said. "Do you really think he's a crook?"

"Naw," the sheriff said. "I'm just keeping twenty men up all night for fun."

The sheriff did some checking on his radio to make sure all his men were where he wanted them. By the time the light went out in Mr. Allen's room I was getting pretty tired of the whole thing.

"Has your granddad figured out yet how Allen is going to get the money?" the sheriff asked.

"If he has, he hasn't told me," I said.

"You know what I think?" the sheriff said. "He's got it all figured out and he aims to nab Allen himself—and make me look silly. He's been acting sly all day and now he's run off without telling anyone where he was going. He's up to something."

We waited a while longer and then the sheriff started his motor. I looked up and saw Mr. Allen come down off our porch and hurry out to his car. You couldn't miss that funny limp of his. He drove off and the sheriff pulled out right behind him.

We didn't have any trouble following him. He drove out Borgville Road and then south on Jennings Road. He turned in at the Abe Meadows farm, got out, and went up to the house.

The sheriff shifted some of his men around, and he said, "Johnny, run up to the house and see if you can look in. Find out what they're doing and come right back."

All the shades were up, so I didn't have any trouble. Mr. Meadows, his married son Roger, and Mr. Allen were sitting around a table, drinking beer. I went back and told the sheriff.

He scratched his head and said, "Meadows isn't even on the committee."

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We waited for nearly an hour, parked down the road. Then the yard light came on and Mr. Allen limped out to his car and drove off. He drove right back to Borgville, never doing better than forty-five, and parked in front of our house. But he didn't go up to the house. He walked down the street towards town.

"Sheriff?" I said.

"Lemme think, dammit!" he said.

"He's not limping," I said. "He don't walk like Mr. Allen."

The sheriff jumped out of the car and ran and I was right behind him. We caught up with the fellow under the street light and it was Roger Meadows.

"What the devil are *you* doing here?" the sheriff said.

"Why shouldn't I be here?" Roger said.

The sheriff didn't wait for any explanation. He almost drove off without me, and I never heard a man swear so. He was doing seventy before we hit the edge of town, yelling into his radio as he drove.

When he finally quieted down I said, "Out there at the farm he walked with a limp."

The sheriff started swearing again.

"He's about the same build as Mr. Allen," I said. "The light wasn't too good and from where we were he sure looked like him."

"Shut up!" the sheriff yelled.

What with the swearing and the sheriff keeping the accelerator flat on the floor, that was the wildest ride I ever had. We went screaming into the yard at the Meadows place and the sheriff nearly kicked in the door before Mrs. Meadows opened it.

"Where's Allen?" the sheriff yelled.

"He and Abe went over to see Pete Farrell," Mrs. Meadows said.

The sheriff didn't even thank her. It's all of ten miles from there to the Farrell place and we made it in ten minutes, on a bumpy country road. Mrs. Farrell came to the door in her nightgown and she said yes, Mr. Allen and Mr. Meadows had been there and her husband had gone with them. She didn't know where, but there'd been some talk about a poker game Bill Cummings was putting on.

The sheriff went back to his car and radioed three deputies to go to the Cummings place. They called him back just as we were getting to the edge of Borgville. They said Mr. Cummings was playing poker for ten cent stakes with my Grandfather and Mr. Walling and Mr. Naylor, and should they pick them up for gambling? The sheriff told them to forget it, but to be on the lookout for Mr. Allen.

We tore down Main Street again and as we passed our street I took a glance up towards our house. "Sheriff?" I said.

"Shut up!" he said.

"I think Mr. Allen's car is gone."

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He slammed on the brakes. We drove back to our house and sure enough, I was right. The sheriff got Mom out of bed, but she said she hadn't heard a thing. They went up to Mr. Allen's room and all of his things were gone.

"That's strange," Mom said. "He told me he was leaving tomorrow."

The sheriff went to check with the deputies he'd left watching the Snubbs house and Miss Phillips's apartment, and then he had to go over and get Mr. Hansen out of bed to make sure Mr. Allen hadn't gotten away with the Improvement Committee's money. Mr. Hansen said, "Nonsense!" and slammed the door in the sheriff's face.

The sheriff drove back to our house and we sat there until Grandfather came home about two o'clock, the sheriff sending his men tearing all over the county looking for Allen's car, and them not finding anything, and the sheriff getting madder all the time.

Grandfather said he'd won $2.40, and was too tired to talk.

"What were you doing there?" the sheriff said. "You gave up poker twenty years ago."

"That's all you know about it," Grandfather said.

Grandfather made me go to bed, so I don't know what the sheriff did after that, but when we saw him after church the next morning he sure looked as if he'd been up all night.

He was waiting for us on the front porch and he said, "I want to talk to you, Rastin."

"No," Grandfather said. "I want to talk to you."

"Talk, then," the sheriff said.

They sat down in the parlor and Grandfather said, "Back in the spring of '45 . . ."

"Let's talk about Allen," the sheriff said.

". . . there was a war going on, and there was a young fellow in the army in Germany and he met a pretty German girl and they fell in love."

The sheriff grunted.

"Well," Grandfather said, "these two wanted to get married, but there wasn't time. The boy went back to war, and a couple of weeks later he was shot up powerful bad. He lost a leg, and pretty near lost his life, and he was in the hospital for maybe a couple of years. As soon as he was able, he wrote letters to the girl, but he never got an answer. When he got out of the hospital he went back to Germany, but he couldn't find any trace of the girl, except that she'd married some GI and gone to America. She never heard what happened to him, you see, and she thought he was dead.

"Well, down through the years he kept trying to trace that girl, and finally he found out she was living in Borgville. So he came here. He didn't intend to see her or anything like that. He just wanted to make sure she was happy. But

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when he got here he found—you know what he found?"

"Walling called in this morning," the sheriff said. "Said his wife had run out on him."

"Allen didn't like what he found," Grandfather said. "But he didn't want to make people talk and get Mrs. Walling in trouble. He kept telephoning and if Walling answered he'd hang up. And a few times he caught her in the house alone so they could talk. They couldn't say much on a party line, though, and he tried to get her to meet him somewhere, and once she said she would, but she was too scared of her husband to do it.

"Meantime, Allen was afraid people would be suspicious and connect him with Mrs. Walling, so he decided to give Borgville a park. Turned out not to be a good idea. Attracted too much attention to him and put your deputies on him so he couldn't go anywhere. At that point I had a talk with him and found out what was going on. All he wanted was a chance to talk to the girl. So I had Bill Cummings to arrange that poker game. You know how Walling likes poker. That got him out of the house and some other people helped out to get your wolves off Allen's heels. He saw the girl and she packed a suitcase and Meadows drove them out to Highway 27 where Roger Meadows was waiting with Allen's car, and they took off. They're four states away by now, so you can turn your wolves out to pasture."

"Allen?" the sheriff said. "Allen and—Mrs. Walling?"

"Well, she was a real pretty girl when she first came here. If she gets rid of that pig of a husband she has, maybe she'll be pretty again."

The sheriff banged on the table. "Look here. Allen stole another man's wife. That's worse than stealing money. And you helped him, which makes you an accessory—before the fact."

"Horse feathers," Grandfather said. "Allen didn't *steal* her. He gave her a chance to get away and when she found out she could do it without getting her neck broken, she jumped at it. The cows on Walling's farm got better treatment than his wife, and you know it. Allen's got money and he says he'll help her get a divorce if she wants it, and besides, she's old enough to decide that for herself. It's none of the law's business."

The sheriff didn't say anything. Finally he got up and started for the door. He snarled over his shoulder, "Stealing another man's wife! I should have locked him up."

Last week we had a nice letter from Mr. Allen. He sent us a picture of Mrs. Walling and him, only now she's Mrs. Allen. She was dressed nice and she'd gained weight and looked real pretty

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again. Mr. Allen had his arm around her, and they both seemed happy.

Mr. Allen said he was sorry about the fuss he'd stirred up in Borgville, but he'd written to Lawyer Arnell, telling him to go ahead and get those fifteen acres from Old Man Edwards and deed them to Borgville. And he wanted to help out with the park. There was a check with the letter, for $5000, made out to the Borgville Improvement Committee.

Sheriff Pilkins came over to see the letter. He read it through, looked at the picture, and muttered something about wife stealers. "And I still think the fellow is a swindler," he said.

Grandfather shrugged. "Could be," he said. He looked for a long time at the picture, then he grinned at the sheriff. "Could be. But if he is, this is the best swindle Borgville ever had."

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EDITORS' FILE

AUTHOR: **THEODORE MATHIESON**

TITLE: ***Omar Khayyam, Detective***

TYPE: Detective Story

LOCALE: Khorassan, in ancient Persia

TIME: Twelfth Century

COMMENTS: *In which Omar the Tentmaker, astronomer-poet, solves the locked-room murder of his friend the vizier—through a dying message circled in wine in the Rubaiyat itself!*

THE GUARDS CAME FOR OMAR AT midnight, rapping secretly upon the door of his observatory tower on the edge of the town.

"Three soldiers of the Sultan are below, O Master," said Khwaja Ali, the algebraist, who had climbed up the narrow stairway to the second floor to awaken the sleeping astronomer-poet. "They come to escort you to the palace at once!"

"At this hour?" Omar asked, blinking in the yellow light of Ali's lanthorn. Then he was wide-awake, his stern features alert, his eagle-like eyes beneath tufted brows intent upon the worried, wrinkled face of his assistant. His King and patron, Malik Shah, was not the kind of monarch to indulge in caprice.

"They do not demand your person with arrogance, but rather with urgent secrecy," Khwaja Ali said soothingly, regarding his Master with affection. "But they ask you to make all haste."

Omar slipped quickly into his robe and sandals, wrapped his turban around his head, recalling as he did so the words spoken by his friend, the Vizier Nizam al Mulk, when he, Omar, first became the King's star-gazer.

"I think thou art firm in Malik Shah's favor, but forget not, O Son of Ibrahim, that that favor is the very pole of thy tent—without it, thy house would fall!"

Omar's conscience was clear. But as he descended to the waiting soldiers, he wondered fleetingly about the vengeful murmuring of the

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mullahs—the Mohammedan priests—against the new calendar he now worked upon. Did they not complain that he was basing his investigation upon the star tables of Ptolemy, and was Ptolemy not an infidel? Perhaps the mullahs had succeeded in convincing Malik Shah that Omar's project was sacrilegious after all.

But Omar's questions died upon his tongue when he saw the soldiers with their cast-down eyes and compressed lips. They would not, or could not, tell him anything. He nodded curtly to indicate his readiness, then followed them in silence out of the tower, down the moonlit road and through the Takin gate of Nisapur, past the fountain, now deep in the shadow of the plane trees, and finally up the stone sloping way that led to the palace upon the Hill of the Seventh Mosque.

Malik Shah awaited Omar in an ante-chamber off the throne room, sitting upon a pile of cushions as he watched the ludicrous gyrations and posings of a wizened, humpbacked figure clad in red silk—his jester, Jafarak. The Sultan's young face, dark and abstracted, lightened as Omar entered, and he sprang to his feet, first bidding the jester to retire.

"Welcome, Omar Khayyam, I am much relieved to see you."

Omar bowed low, and the Sultan dismissed the soldiers.

"I have called you because you are a true friend of my vizier, Nizam al Mulk. Is this not so?"

"It is," Omar said unhesitatingly. "It was Nizam who gained me your favor, O Great King."

"Did you and Nizam once not make a pledge to help one another?"

Omar nodded. "Yes, many years ago, when we were boys."

"Tell me about it." The Sultan spoke with a curious intentness.

"Nizam and I had the same master, the Sufi Imam Mowaffac. There were three of us who were students together—Nizam, Hassan Ben Sabbah, and I. One day Hassan said to Nizam and me: 'It is a universal belief that pupils of Imam Mowaffac will attain to fortune. Now even if all of us do not attain thereto, let us make a vow that to whomsoever this fortune falls, he shall share it equally with the rest.'

"Afterwards Hassan wandered to Egypt and accomplished little, and I travelled between Khorassan and Bagdad and also made no mark. But Nizam al Mulk rose to a great place beside you, O Arranger of the World, as your administrator. And finally, when Hassan and I remembered our pact and came to him for help, Nizam gained for us your patronage."

When Omar had finished, the Sultan reached out and touched the astronomer lightly on the shoulder.

"Remember, then, Omar Khayyam, that Nizam al Mulk helped

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you in your need. He is a lonely man, and intimate with none save you and Hassan. And now he needs your help!"

"I stand ready to surrender my life for Nizam, O Great King."

"It is well," the Sultan said. "Nizam is in fear for his very life, and will not leave his chamber. Come. He needs your comfort and sympathy."

The monarch led the way up a steep, narrow flight of marble steps to the turret room where the vizier slept and worked. Before a heavy wooden door, reinforced with wrought iron, stood two guards who stepped rigidly aside as the Sultan pounded upon the planks with his fists.

"Open, Nizam!" he called. "It is Malik Shah!"

There came the clank of a heavy chain and the rasping slide of a huge bolt; the door opened and the Sultan and Omar Khayyam passed through.

The room was small and cell-like, having only one door and a window opposite. The single window rose almost to the ceiling, with a metal grating extending across the lower third to prevent a misstep which would plunge its unlucky occupant to the courtyard a hundred feet below. The walls were solid stone.

Omar was astonished to see how much the vizier had changed in the weeks since he had last seen him. His tall frame, clad in a blue and white tunic, looked thin and wasted, and his once raven hair was streaked with grey. The effort of pushing the heavy bolt back into place seemed to have exhausted him, and he now sank upon his sleeping rugs and stared before him.

"He will not talk with me," a rich, bass voice said, and Omar looked at red-faced Hassan Ben Sabbah, the tax collector, who sat quietly within the window embrasure. "He believes that he is doomed, Omar, and that nothing will avert his kismet."

Nazim turned to Hassan. "I do not love nor trust thee any less, my dear friend," he said with a slow smile. "It is just that thou, like the Arranger of the World, our Great King, think I should busy myself with affairs of state, and pay no attention to the fear that consumes me. But that I cannot do."

Omar kneeled before the vizier. "But here am I, Nizam," he said gently, "Omar the Tentmaker. Thy dear friend also. Of what art thou afraid?"

"Omar," the vizier said, "if my August King will permit it, I will talk with thee. But alone—alone!"

"Very well," the Sultan's voice thundered in the little space, "I have tried to reason with him, Hassan has tried, and both of us have failed. Now it is your turn, Omar Khayyam. I must have a vizier who has all his senses, for I plan to leave Khorassan for Ar-

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menia before the next moon, and the vizier must function properly here while I am gone. See you, Omar Khayyam, that you do not fail! Else the favor he has won you might pass with his reason!"

The Sultan left the chamber then, and with him the squat, powerful-bodied Hassan Ben Sabbah, who stopped on his way and laid a corded arm upon Omar's shoulder.

"Do succeed, old friend," Hassan whispered, "or else we might both lose our posts!"

"What dost thou fear, Nizam?" Omar asked again when at the vizier's request he had rebolted the door.

"I fear death, Omar," Nizam said simply.

And Omar smiled and recited softly: "'When you and I behind the Veil are past . . .'"

"No, Omar," the vizier protested, "none of thy quatrains now!" He picked up a leather-bound volume from a low table. "I have thy poems here should I have need of their consolation. Only when death is impersonal can one be philosophical in flights of poetry. But *this* death is a *man,* and he shadows *me,* waiting to strike!"

"Who?"

"Rahim Zaid!"

Omar gasped. Rahim Zaid was the almost legendary leader of the Assassins, a fanatical, murderous group of revolutionaries whose headquarters was the rocky fortress of Alamut in the mountains far to the north of Nisapur, at the foot of the Caspian Sea. Stories of Rahim Zaid's horrible, bloody acts were told to frighten children into ways of good, and his weird power over the bodies and souls of his myriad henchmen made Amirs and Sultans alike check frequently upon the trustworthiness of their personal bodyguard. Hearing the Assassin chief's name spoken now brought his presence into the chamber like a chilling spectre.

"You mean he is here—here in the palace?" Omar whispered incredulously.

"I'm sure of it. He has come to revenge himself upon me."

Nizam picked up a thin piece of paper from a low table. "This message was pressed into my palm by a camel driver in the streets of Nisapur two weeks ago."

Omar took the paper and read: "Rahim Zaid is on his way to Nisapur. He has vowed to assassinate Nizam al Mulk for executing two of his most trusted servants, one of whom was his only son."

"I caught the two assassins lying in the palace court in a drugged sleep, revealing themselves in mindless talk." The vizier lowered his voice. "I am among the few who know Rahim Zaid's secret, that all his minions are addicts of the drug known as bhang, or hashish—a drug that only he can supply."

"But hast thou not shown this note to Malik Shah? Cannot he understand thy plight?"

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"He says his guards will keep me safe. But in spite of the King's protection, already Zaid has struck!" Nizam stopped his pacing and seized Omar by his sleeve. "My trusted servant Akroenos—thou rememberest him?"

"He who saved thy life at Serdasht!"

"The same. He is gone, disappeared—over a week ago. Malik Shah has had the palace searched from turret to dungeon, and Akroenos is nowhere to be found. But I know. Zaid has destroyed him, so I might be made more vulnerable! And now—aiwallah!—I have made a terrible discovery, Omar. I am a coward. I am utterly afraid to die."

"But behind these locked doors, with the Sultan's guards in front of them, thou art surely safe!"

"No, Omar. They say this man Rahim Zaid is a magician who has the power to be in two places at once—to walk through stone walls! His henchmen believe he has the powers of a God and they will die at his command. I know thy scientific mind does not credit such fantasy, but perhaps if thou wert in my place—"

Omar who had been watching the anguished features of his friend with great pity was suddenly distracted by moving lights in the darkness beyond the window.

"Servants prepare the court below for tomorrow morning's entertainment," Nizam said heavily, following Omar's gaze. "The Dervishes of Astrabad will perform for the Sultan."

"Thou must come down with me and see them!"

"I can see them from here. They come from Astrabad." Nizam pulled his lower lip reflectively. "That is not far from Alamut, you know—where stands the fortress of Rahim Zaid!"

At a clap of the Sultan's hands the sound of the flute and muffled drums began, and Omar, who sat at the King's right hand, watched a dozen men in black robes with wide sleeves, wearing tall, yellow camel's-hair kulas on their heads, come into the courtyard one after another and bow low before the Sultan's box.

The morning was warm and clear, and the sunshine pleasant, for summer had not yet come; across the large courtyard opposite them ran a crenelated wall, in the center of which rose the turret which contained the vizier's chamber. High up, almost under the battlemented roof, Omar saw the shadowed window of his friend, and although the astronomer had looked often, Nizam had not appeared.

From time to time Omar noticed that the Sultan himself looked worriedly at the turret window. Hassan Ben Sabbah, too, had marked the King's concern, for presently the tax gatherer said:

"I could go once more to fetch

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Nazim, O King, if it is your will."

"No, Hassan. The man has become very foolish, and I am afraid will be of little use to me." The Sultan turned impatiently to Omar. "You did little to give him courage last night, Omar Khayyam."

"It is the malign power of Rahim Zaid that terrifies him," Omar said quietly. "He suspects that this man might even now be here—among them." He pointed to the dervishes, who had sat down along one side of the courtyard while their leader, a sheik, appeared and now began speaking of the history of the Astrabad Dervishes, and now their gyrations, which presently were to begin, represented the movements of stars in the heavens.

"Does your oracular vision reveal the Evil One among the dervishes, Zuleika?" Malik Shah asked, leaning forward to address a patriarchal old man with a white beard and blue gown, who sat on Omar's right.

Zuleika, the court astrologer, leaned forward and peered intently and dramatically at the row of black-clad dervishes, and then bowed to the Sultan.

"I see not the Evil One here, O King," he said, and then he smiled unpleasantly at Omar. "But perhaps Khwaja Omar, who disdains to consult the stars to foretell the future, but merely computes their movement from the tables of an infidel—perhaps he can divine the Evil One with his scientific gaze!"

But before Omar could answer, Jafarak, the wizened humpbacked jester bounded down from the marble gallery and began capering grotesquely in front of the Sultan's box, as if he could not bear to have his master's attention given to any but him.

"Cease, Jafarak!" the Sultan said angrily. "Go to your chamber!"

Jafarak made a woeful face, twisted his body ruefully, then darted along the side of the court and disappeared through a postern door in the crenelated wall opposite them.

By this time the sheik had finished his talk, the music began again, and the dervishes rose and with calm and assured movements, lifting the right arm, bent, the head turned to the right and the left arm outstretched, slowly stepped into the court and with extraordinary seriousness began to turn, at the same time moving around in a large circle. Young dervishes turned with incredible speed, and older men turned more slowly, and they all wove in and out, making strange circular patterns, but no one of them ever touched another.

Omar always found the gyrations of the dervishes exciting, but now he felt breathless as he watched the incredibly skillful whirling of the Astrabad group. So concentrated was he that he did not see the figure in white and blue when it first appeared for an instant in the turret window. It showed twice more, as

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if struggling with some unseen assailant, and then cried out, and Omar raised his eyes at last from the whirling dervishes.

"Look! It is Nizam!" Hassan cried, pointing.

"He appears to be fighting for his life!" Omar exclaimed, starting up.

"Rahim Zaid!" The voice cried piercingly over the music and muted shuffling of the dervishes, and the next moment the figure of the vizier was roughly thrust forward, toppling over the metal grating, and with a loud cry and flailing limbs went hurtling down to the broad stone passageway which lay below the level of the court.

Omar was on his feet at once, running fleetly across the courtyard towards the postern door. He heard the Sultan issuing quick orders behind him, was aware the dervishes had ceased their whirling, one by one, and then he dashed through the door into a palm-lined garden with a plashing fountain. The stairs to the turret chamber lay to his left, and he mounted them with great strides.

At the top of the flight he hesitated, surprised to discover that the guards were gone. The next instant he flung himself against the heavy, iron-bound door, and then stepped back, thunderstruck, his pulses pounding in his ears.

The door was securely locked from within.

"The murderer is still there!" he cried, and as if in answer he heard the scuffling of footsteps upon the stairs, and a half dozen of the Sultan's personal guard appeared.

"There," Omar said, pointing at the heavy marble bench that stood upon the landing. "Lift the top of that and break in the door!"

It took three of them to lift the seat, and the rest to maneuver the heavy marble as a battering ram. Even so it required at least two dozen shattering blows before the door split in twain, the hinges and the lock on the inside still intact.

Omar stepped cautiously inside the chamber. The room was in a turmoil—low tables overturned, books and sleeping rugs scattered about—a fresh pool of blood on the stone floor near the window.

Omar stepped gingerly over the ruddy pool into the window embrasure, and grasping the metal grating, stared down into the passageway. There he could see the contorted body of his friend, Nazim al Mulk, and grouped around him, the Sultan, Hassan Ben Sabbah, Zuleika the astrologer, and others.

"Did no one escape through the window?" Omar called down, aware of the trembling disbelief in his own voice.

"No one," Hassan called back.

Then the Sultan looked up at Omar.

"Your friend Nizam is dead, Omar Khayyam!" he cried, and the court rang around with his voice . . .

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Omar squatted alone before the body of his friend in the Chamber of the Dead in the silent heart of the palace, but he did not pray. He felt sad and bewildered. At first he thought that perhaps Nizam had killed himself in fear and desperation—thrown himself from the turret window. But that was not so. A foot-long dagger had been thrust straight and deep into the vizier's back. Nizam could never have stabbed himself, so Omar knew his murderer had been in the room with him.

But how could that be? Omar himself had examined every inch of the floor, wall, and ceiling, and had found no place that was not solid for the depth of a foot or more. The door had been securely bolted and locked from within. No one had clambered up or down from the turret windows—he had the assurance of all those who had watched outside from the courtyard.

It was true that the guards had fled—they had been seen riding hard out of Nisapur—but that did not change the incontrovertible evidence that there had been someone in the chamber with Nizam and that someone had murdered the vizier. For beneath the overturned table Omar had discovered two jade cups that had recently been filled with wine.

And then there was the calfskin-bound book of his own poems—the *Rubaiyat*—face down, opened to a page upon which a wine-dipped finger had hastily encircled one of the quatrains. The mark was fresh, the odor of the vintage still clung to the vellum. Omar was certain that Nizam knew he was going to die, and had thus secretly marked the poem to tell him, Omar Khayyam, that at that moment his murderer was with him.

Perhaps, if Omar could read his own quatrain aright, Nizam might even be telling him more.

How went that quatrain? Omar recited it slowly to himself:

"There was the Door to which I found no key;
There was the Veil through which I might not see;
Some little talk awhile of me and thee
There was—and then no more of thee and me."

A cool draught blew upon Omar's neck, and presently he looked up to see a young servant of the Sultan standing beside him.

"Malik Shah wishes you to come to him in the hill garden, Omar Khayyam," the boy whispered with a frightened glance at the still form of the vizier.

Omar found the Sultan lying amid cushions beside a stream that issued from a grotto, engaged in a converation with Zuleika, the court astrologer. The jester Jafarak sat mournfully upon a stone, watching his master with spaniel eyes. The Sultan looked up with sharp dislike as Omar approached and bowed.

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"Omar Khayyam, Zuleika tells me Rahim Zaid has great magical powers. Do you believe that Nazim was killed by the sorcery of this wizard?"

"I do not, O King," Omar said quietly.

"Can you tell me how it was done?"

"I cannot."

The Sultan's lip curled. "Very well. It is my command that you discover by your beloved scientific methods how Nizam was killed by an assassin in a room where he was obviously alone. Bring me proof, star-gazer, that the murder was *not* committed by magic. If you fail me in this, you will be exiled from Khorassan!"

"Your command is the shaper of my kismet, O King," Omar said, "but how have I earned your displeasure? It is true that I was friend to Nizam and yet could not stop his murder. But so was Hassan Ben Sabbah his friend, and do you threaten him, too, with exile?"

The Sultan's eyes flashed dangerously. "You speak plainly, Omar Khayyam. I can do no less. You received my patronage at the request of Nizam al Mulk, upon whom I depended and trusted. It was not I who valued the astrolabe and water clock and star lantern, these things which speak infidel heresies. You have always scorned to read the oracles from the skies by which I have successfully guided my life, and so your work is useless to me. Just as your friendship has now proved useless to Nizam al Mulk. Now I demand profitable results from you! Prove to me that Nizam was not killed with magic, and you have my promise of continued patronage. If you fail, you must go. Return to your tower. I give you three days, no more, to bring me the answer."

Omar bowed low.

"One boon before I go, O Arranger of the World."

"Speak it."

"You have heard of the drug called bhang or hashish?"

The Sultan gasped and arose, gathering his robes around him. He turned a plainly frightened face towards Zuleika and Jafarak and dismissed them with an imperative gesture. When he and Omar were alone he said:

"Where have you heard of this drug, star-gazer?"

"Nizam al Mulk told me of it."

"I warn you, speak not of it outside of this court, on pain of death!" the Sultan said sharply. "The day the rulers of Persia let their people know of the existence of such a drug, their power will begin to wane. It is said to make hollow husks of men. But Allah be praised, it is known now only slightly in the north. The common man has not heard of it at all."

"You have seen it?"

"Yes. It is a brownish powder. I have a vial of it which was sent to me by the Amir of Mazandaran,

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who received it directly from Rahim Zaid himself. I have never broken the seal."

"Then give me this vial, O Arranger of the World. I shall use it to discover the truth about Nizam's death. You may not look upon my work as useful, but have you ever had cause to distrust me?"

The Sultan looked deeply into Omar's eyes, and then shrugged.

"You shall have the vial, Omar Khayyam."

Omar awoke in the silence of the night, lying upon his sleeping rugs in his tower, and trembled in secret ecstacy over the memory of the inner world he had just visited. A world of breath-taking beauty—of winking stars and gentle spring breezes, of incredibly verdant grass as soft as silk, of rich red Shiraz wine that flowed like water from between cool, moss-grown rocks, and of shapely houris—not made of dream-stuff, but of warm and palpitating flesh which his waking hand still tingled from touching.

He felt an aching impatience rise in him, a longing to return from whence he had just come. He rose to his kness in the darkness.

"Ali!" he whispered, and then louder, "Ali!"

He could hear his assistant, the algebraist, breathing deeply across the chamber, and crawled over to him.

"Ali!" he said loudly, and Ali stirred and sat up. "Give me the vial. I know I entrusted it to your care, but I wish more of the powder."

"No, Master, no!" the other cried, frightened gripping the leather pouch he wore around his waist. "You made me swear by Allah that I should give you no more."

"Give it to me!" Omar pleaded, and when the other refused, he struggled to reach his fingers into the pouch.

But Ali was heavy and strong, and he squirmed and wriggled towards the window. At the last he rose, hurled Omar away from him, and while the astonomer lay panting upon the floor, Ali took the glass vial from the pouch, broke it upon the embrasure and cast the powder into the moonlit night . . .

Later, by the light from the iron-wrought lanthorn, Omar studied his face carefully in the oval of burnished bronze and gave a long, shuddering sigh.

"You have been a good friend, Ali," he said, "and saved me from a terrible end . . ."

Upon the evening of the second day the carrier pigeon from the Amir of Mazandaran far to the north brought an answer to a message sent by Omar.

"Greetings, Omar the Tentmaker!

Rahim Zaid is at Alamut, and has not left it for the past year. He is now quite old, as you know, and accomplishes much of his proselytizing through the aid of

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gifted subordinates. His control over every member of his organization is as absolute as it ever was, and he spreads tirelessly the legend of his power and his evil. Here in Amol it is difficult to know whether the people fear the name of Rahim Zaid more than they love the justice of their Amir. The godless Assassins become an increasing and ever-present danger. May Allah destroy them!

And upon the third morning, as the first streaks of dawn appeared in the sky, Omar walked with his algebraist Khawaja Ali along the path of the cemetry above the river, where the yellow headstones leaned this way and that beneath the slim cypresses.

For hours they walked with only an occasional word between them until they reached a newly dug grave without a headstone almost totally concealed by the thick screening of a sad willow. Here Omar stopped and mopped his brow with his long sleeve, and glanced thoughtfully at the sun which stood almost at the zenith.

"At two of the afternoon I must be at the palace to give my answer, Khwaja Ali. Have we time enough?"

"Nisapur cannot do without its astronomer, Master, any more than I can do without my job," Khwaja Ali said practically.

And at two o'clock Omar began speaking quietly from a dais before the throne of the Sultan.

"I knew *who* murdered Nazim from the very first, O King," he said, "The vizier left a book of my poems open, and had circled one of the quatrains with wine. This told me the identity of the murderer, but did not explain the more perplexing problem of how Nizam had been murdered."

The Sultan listened with hard eyes, with a stern, judicial finger laid along his cheek. Standing below Omar and the King upon the vast mosaic stood princes of the blood, as well as servants and retainers.

Zuleika was there, looking at Omar with black-eyed malice.

Jafarak the jester sat upon the step of the dais, hugging his bony knees to his chest, his eyes enormous and wondering.

Hassan Ben Sabbah stood amid a cluster of mullahs, his arms folded across his broad chest, his gaze intent upon Omar's face.

Far behind the others, in the dim shadows of the throne room, stood the black-clad dervishes, who had been detained at the palace to perform again after the burial of Nizam al Mulk.

"What said this quatrain?" the Sultan demanded.

Omar quoted the four lines slowly.

"And the murderer is given there?" Malik Shah asked, annoyed.

"Assuredly. Listen—

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There was the Door to which I
found no Key;
There was the Veil through
which I might not see;

The first two lines do not especially apply, except to hint at Nazim's predicament. Perhaps he meant that his murderer had managed to get through his door, and Nizam had no key to stop him. The veil through which he might not see was his murderer's plan of action, although I do not think that Nizam at that moment was thinking too subtly. He intended that the last two lines should reveal his killer.

Some little talk awhile of me
and thee
There was—and then no more of
thee and me.

"In our tongue, O King, *thee* and *thou* are forms of address used only within one's family and to childhood friends. You said yourself, just three nights ago, that Nizam was a lonely man and intimate with none except Hassan and me. We were the only two men in the world whom he addressed as 'thee'—because we went to school together. Nizam referred to his King always in the third person. Therefore, eliminating myself, I knew that Nizam, in encircling the poem, meant that he had had as his final visitor one whom he addressed as 'thee'—in other words, Hassan!"

There was a stir throughout the chamber and Hassan stepped forward, his face red, his breath coming in short gasps.

"O King, this man, whom I once called my friend, has slandered me! I was with you when Nizam was murdered—as all the court knows! Let me kill him instantly, that his foul accusation may never be repeated!"

Without waiting for the Sultan's word Hassan drew his sword and stalked forward. Omar held out his arms slowly.

"I am without a weapon," he said simply.

"Halt, Hassan!" the King cried. "You were indeed by my side when Nizam fell from the turret. I cannot believe this astronomer myself. Yet let him speak. If he cannot prove what he charges, he shall have his belly filled with sand!"

"I shall prove it," Omar said. "Nizam was afraid of Rahim Zaid, because Nizam had two of his spies executed, one of whom was Zaid's son. Zaid appointed one of his chief subordinates—Hassan—to carry out the crime of slaying Nizam in a way to spread the terror of Zaid's name."

"I am no spy!" Hassan bellowed.

"You are indeed. You are a puppet of Rahim Zaid, as are all in his employ. They are his slaves, body and soul, and do anything he says because he is the only source for the hashish without which you cannot live!"

The Sultan rose from his throne in great wrath.

"I warned you, Omar Khayyam, that if you ever whispered that word—"

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"If I do not say it aloud, Malik Shah, your throne might well be taken away from you!"

The Sultan's mouth fell agape as he stared in wonder.

"Look you now, and let your soldiers be wary to protect you!" Omar walked towards spectators who parted at his advance. "Jafarak is a spy, and I can see others here, a mullah, a soldier—" Omar pointed them out.

At a signal from the king his personal bodyguard grouped themselves on either side of the throne, swords ready.

"How know you this?" the Sultan demanded.

"By their eyes. The pupil of the eye of a drug-taker opens to the size of a sunflower seed. I took the hashish myself the other night, and watched the pupils of my own eyes remain enlarged for hours afterwards. I felt the craving, too, and knew that if I took a second dose of the drug I might be willing to kill to get more. Just as Hassan Ben Sabbah is willing to kill, and Jafarak, at the command of their master."

"I am no spy, O King!" Hassan bellowed again.

"Then prove it!" Omar cried in a ringing voice. "Let Malik Shah put you in a cell and keep you there for a week *without hashish*. I think then you will tell him the truth!"

A silence fell, and gradually Hassan lowered his eyes and the belligerence drained out of his face.

Malik Shah shook his head as if he could not believe what he had heard, and yet when he addressed Omar it was with a new respect.

"And how was Nazim killed in a chamber locked from within, Omar?" he asked.

"He wasn't. Hassan visited him before the performance of the dervishes, as he admitted the other day when he said to you: 'I could go *once more* to fetch Nazim.' As he sat drinking wine with Nazim, perhaps his attitude or his words told the vizier the truth; or perhaps the wine was drugged and Nazim felt the effect creeping upon him. In any case, Nazim managed to leave his message for me before he was killed and carried out of the turret room."

"Then whose body was it that we saw fall from the turret?"

From beneath his gown Omar took a blue tunic, covered with blood and earth stains, and threw it down upon the dais. Hassan shuddered and started back.

"His servant, Akroenos, whom Zaid's spies had taken captive a week before and made a slave of the drug. Akroenos was brave, but he was also ignorant. Unless such a man *knew* he was being drugged, he would accept his inner experiences as real. Believe me, they seem so, O King. Akroenos's captors must have promised him he could remain forever in his paradise if he would but sacrifice himself—and he believed them."

"Then it was he who fell from the tower?"

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Omar nodded. "Remember, the body fell out of immediate sight into the broad passage below the level of the court. Was it you, Jafarak, who pulled Akroenos away and replaced him with the previously murdered body of Nizam?"

The jester began shaking his head convulsively, but guilt was stamped on every feature.

"How did you know it was Akroenos?" Hassan asked suddenly, then gasped and looked frightened at the King.

"The guards had run away," Omar replied. "I reasoned they were afraid that under torture the truth might be forced from them. Not about who came out from the locked room after the pseudo murder—*nobody could have*. But they had seen who had gone in before and had carried out Nizam—*and who had gone in afterwards to take his place and hurl himself from the turret room*. I knew it had to be a slave of Rahim Zaid who would thus kill himself, and that they would have to hide his body afterwards. Khwaja Ali and I looked for a newly dug, unmarked grave, and we found it concealed beneath a willow. We took the time to dig down and we found the body of—Akroenos. That is all, O King."

Omar bowed low before the Sultan. "May I leave now, O King? There is much work to be done upon the new calendar."

Malik Shah nodded slowly and a grim smile touched his lips.

"Go, Omar Khayyam, and be assured of my blessing."

Omar descended into the hall and the crowd parted before him. At the farther end, after passing the dervishes, he turned and looked back at the Sultan, and saw that the astrologer, Zuleika, had approached the King's side.

"You have more to say, Omar Khayyam?" the Sultan called, his voice echoing among the high galleries.

"One more thing, O King. I have seen these dervishes perform. They are most skilled. But the sheik said their gyrations represent the stars in the heavens. That might deceive an astrologer, or one who knows nothing of true scientific observation. But the motions of these dervishes describe the movements of *no* star or planet I have ever seen in the heavens. If you study their gyrations carefully, however, you will find them making outlines of Persian letters, spelling out a message for those among their audience who understand. They, too, I fear, are minions of Rahim Zaid, and I would watch them carefully."

And without further word Omar Khayyam strode out of the chamber.

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DEPARTMENT OF "FIRST STORIES"

Here is the second in our rejuvenated Department of "First Stories" —a clever and witty pastiche-parody of The Master (in this instance, Mr. Schlock Homes), complete with nostalgic gambit, the arrival of a distressed client, the classic and instantaneous flight of deduction (including a delicious riposte by The Great Man himself), a five-pipe problem involving an itinerant Egyptologist and some unsavoury and desperate characters—indeed, a bright, sometimes brilliant, take-off of the Conanical Writings that even non-devotees will find most amusing . . .

The manuscript of this "first story" came to us from Rio de Janeiro where the author, a native of Cleveland, Ohio, is a consulting engineer to the Brazilian plastics industry. Mr. Robert Fish is in his mid-forties, married, and has two teenage daughters; his hobbies include travel, bridge, golf—and although he did not specifically mention it, an intimate knowledge of certain Adventures and Memoirs . . .

THE ADVENTURE OF THE ASCOT TIE

by ROBERT L. FISH

IN GOING OVER MY NOTES FOR THE year '59, I find many cases in which the particular talents of my friend, Mr. Schlock Homes, either sharply reduced the labours of Scotland Yard, or eliminated the necessity of their efforts altogether.

There was, for example, The Adventure of the dissembling Musician who, before Homes brought him to justice, managed to take apart half of the instruments of the London Symphony Orchestra and cleverly hide them in various postal-boxes throughout the city, where they remained undiscovered until the denouement of the case. Another example that comes readily to mind was the famous Mayfair Trunk Murder, which Homes finally laid at the door of Mr. Claude Mayfair, the zookeeper who had goaded one of his elephants into strangling a rival for Mrs. Mayfair's affection. And, of course, there was the well-publicized matter involving Miss Millicent Oney, whom Homes refers to, even to this day, as the "Oney Woman."

But of all the cases which I find noted for this particular year, none demonstrate the devious nature of my friend's analytical reasoning powers so much as the case which

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I have listed under the heading of The Adventure of the Ascot Tie.

It was a rather warm morning in June of '59 when I appeared for breakfast in our quarters at 221B Bagel Street. Mr. Schlock Homes had finished his meal and was fingering a telegram which he handed to me as I seated myself at the table.

"Our ennui is about to end, Watney!" said he, his excitement at the thought of a new case breaking through the normal calm of his voice.

"I am very happy to hear that, Homes," I replied in all sincerity, for the truth was I had begun to fear the long stretches of inactivity that often led my friend to needle both himself and me. Taking the telegram from his outstretched hand, I read it carefully. "The lady seems dreadfully upset," I remarked, watching Homes all the while for his reaction.

"You noticed that also, Watney?" said Homes, smiling faintly.

"But of course," I replied. "Her message reads: 'Dear Mr. Homes, I urgently request an audience with you this morning at nine o'clock. I am dreadfully upset.' And it is signed Miss E. Wimpole."

He took the telegram from me and studied it with great care. "Typed on a standard post-office form," he said, "by a standard post-office typewriter. In all probability by a standard post-office employee. Extremely interesting. However, I fear there is little more to be learned until our client presents herself."

At that moment a noise in the street below our open window claimed my attention, and as I glanced out I cried, "Homes! It's a trap!"

"Rather a four-wheeler, I should have judged," replied Homes languidly. "These various vehicles are readily identified by the tonal pitch of the hub-squeal. A trap, for example, is normally pitched in the key of F; a four-wheeler usually in B flat. A hansom, of course, is always in G. However, I fear we must rest this discussion; for here, if I am not mistaken, is our client."

At that moment the page ushered into our rooms a young lady of normal beauty and of about twenty-five years of age. She was carefully dressed in the fashion of the day, and appeared quite distrait.

"Well, Miss Wimpole," said Homes, after she had been comfortably seated and had refused a kipper, "I am quite anxious to hear your story. Other than the fact that you are an addict of side-saddle riding, have recently written a love letter, and stopped on your way here to visit a coal mine, I am afraid that I know little of your problem."

Miss Wimpole took this information with mouth agape. Even I, who am more or less familiar with his methods, was astonished.

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"Really, Homes," I said. "This is too much! Pray explain."

"Quite simple, Watney, he replied, smiling. "There is a shiny spot on the outside of Miss Wimpole's skirt a bit over the outside central part of the thigh which is in the shape of a curved cut of pie. This is the exact shape of the horn of the new type of African saddle which is now so popular among enthusiasts of equestrianism. The third finger of her right hand has a stain of strawberry-coloured ink which is certainly not the type one would use for business or formal correspondence. And lastly, there is a smudge beneath her left eye which could only be coal dust. Since this is the month of June, we can eliminate the handling of coal for such normal reasons as storage or heating, and must therefore deduce her visit to a place where coal would reasonably be in evidence the year around—namely, a coal mine."

Miss Wimpole appeared quite confused by this exchange. "I was forced to leave the house in quite a hurry," she explained apologetically, "and I am afraid that I was not very careful in applying my mascara. As for the jam on my finger, it is indeed strawberry," and she quickly licked it clean before we could remonstrate with her manners. She then contemplated her skirt ruefully. "These new maids," said she, shaking her head sadly. "They are so absent-minded! The one we now have continues to leave the flat-iron connected when she goes to answer the door!"

"Ah, yes," said Homes, after a moment of introspection. "Well, it was certain to have been one or the other. And now, young lady, if you should care to reveal to us the nature of your problem?" He noticed her glance in my direction and added reassuringly, "You may speak quite freely in Dr. Watney's presence. He is quite hard of hearing."

"Well then, Mr. Homes," said she, leaning forward anxiously. "As you undoubtedly deduced from my telegram, my name is Elizabeth Wimpole, and I live with my uncle Jno. Wimpole in a small flat in Barrett Street. My uncle is an itinerant Egyptologist by trade, and for some time we have managed a fairly comfortable living through the itineraries which he has supplied to people contemplating visits to Egypt. However, since the recent troubles there, his business has been very slow, and as a result he has become very moody, keeping to his own company during the day and consorting with a very rough-looking group at the local pub in the evening.

"In order to understand the complete change in the man, it is necessary to understand the type of life which we enjoyed when itinerant Egyptologists were in greater demand. Our home, while always modest, was none the less a meet-

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ing place for the intelligentsia. No less than two curators, an odd politician or so, and several writers counted themselves as friends of my uncle, and the head mummy-unwrapper at the British Museum often dropped by for tea and a friendly chat on common subjects.

"To-day this has all changed. The type of person with whom my uncle is now consorting is extremely crude both in appearance and language, and while I hesitate to make accusations which may be based solely upon my imagination, I fear that several of these ruffians have even been considering making advances against my person, which I am certain my uncle would never have allowed at an earlier day.

"While this situation has naturally worried me a bit, I should have passed it off without too much thought, except that yesterday in the course of casually arranging my uncle's room I chanced upon a telegram in a sealed envelope sewn to the inner surface of one of his shirts. The nature of the message was so puzzling that I felt I needed outside assistance, and therefore made bold to call upon you." With this, she handed to Homes a telegram-form which she had drawn from her purse during her discourse.

Homes laid it upon the table, and I stood over his shoulder as we both studied it. It read as follows:

WIMPY. WE HEIST THE ORIENTAL ICE SATURDAY. AVOID THE OTHERS. HARDWARE NEEDLESS. THE FIX IS IN. WE RIG THE SPLIT FOR TUESDAY. JOE.

A curious change had come over Homes's face as he read this cryptic message. Without a word he turned to the shelf at his side and selected a heavy book bound in calf-skin. Opening it, he silently studied several chapter headings in the index, and then closing it, spoke quietly to Miss Wimpole.

"I wish to thank you for having brought me what promises to be a most interesting problem," he said. "I shall devote my entire energies to the solution. However, I fear there is little that I can tell you without further cogitation. If you will be so kind as to leave your address with Dr. Watney, I am sure that we shall soon be in touch with you with good news."

When the young woman had been shown out, Homes turned to me in great excitement. "An extremely ingenious code, Watney," he chuckled, rubbing his hands together in glee. "As you know, I have written some sixteen monographs on cryptography, covering all phases of hidden and secret writings, from the Rossetti Stone to my latest on the interpretation of instructions for assembling Yule toys. I believe I can honestly say, without false modesty, that there are few in this world who could hope to baffle me with a cipher or code. I shall be very much surprised, therefore, if I do not quick-

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ly arrive at the solution to this one. The difficulty, of course, lies in the fact that there are very few words employed, but as you know the only problems which interest me are the difficult ones. I fear this is going to be a five-pipe problem, so if you do not mind, Watney, handing down my smoking equipment before you leave, I shall get right to it!"

I reached behind me and furnished to him the set of five saffron-coloured pipes which had been the gift of a famous tobacconist to whom Homes had been of service —a case which I have already related in The Adventure of the Five Orange Pipes. By the time I left the room to get my medical bag, he had already filled one and was sending clouds of smoke ceilingwards, as he hunched over the telegram in fierce concentration.

I had a very busy day and did not return to our rooms until late afternoon. Homes was pacing up and down the room with satisfaction. The five pipes were still smoking in various ash-trays about the room, but the frown of concentration had been replaced by the peaceful look Homes invariably employed when he saw daylight in a particularly complex problem.

"You have solved the code," I remarked, setting my bag upon the sideboard.

"You are getting to be quite a detective yourself, Watney," replied Schlock Homes with a smile. "Yes; it was devilishly clever, but in the end I solved it as I felt sure I would."

"I was never in doubt, Homes," I said warmly.

"Watney, you are good for me," answered my friend, clasping my hand gratefully. "Well, the solution is here. You will note the message carefully. It says: 'Wimpy. We heist the oriental ice Saturday. Ameche others. Hardware needless. The fix is in. We rig the split for Tuesday. Joe.' Now, disregarding the punctuation that separates this gibberish, I applied the various mathematical formulæ which are standard in codifying, as well as several which have not been known to be in use for many years, but all to no avail.

"For some hours I must confess I was completely baffled. I even tested the telegram-form for hidden writing, applying benzidrine hypochloric colloid solution to both surfaces; but other than an old shopping list which some post-office clerk had apparently written and then erased, there was nothing to be discovered.

"It was then that I recalled that Mr. Jno. Wimpole was acquainted with a mummy-unwrapper, and the theory occurred to me that in the course of their many conversations it was possible that the secret of ancient Egyptian code writing had entered their discussions. Beginning again on this basis, I applied the system originally developed by

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Tutankhamen for the coding of palace laundry, and at once the message began to make sense. Here, Watney, look at this!"

And underlining the letter W in the word Wimpy, he proceeded to underline the first letter of each alternate word, glancing at my startled face with pleased satisfaction as he did so.

The message now read: WHOS ON FIRST.

"Remarkable, Homes," I said doubtfully, "but if you will forgive me, I find I am as much in the dark as before."

"Ah, Watney," said my friend, now laughing aloud. "When I first read this message, I also was baffled. But that was some hours ago, and I have not spent this time idly. I am now in possession of the major outline of the plot, and while it does not involve any truly serious crime, still it has been quite ingenious and clever. But there is nothing more to be done to-night. Please send a telegram to our client advising her that we shall stop by and pick her up in a cab to-morrow morning at ten, and that we shall then proceed to the locale where the entire mystery shall be resolved."

"But, Homes!" I protested. "I do not understand this thing at all!"

"You shall, Watney, the first thing to-morrow," said Homes, still smiling broadly. "But no more for tonight. The Weare brothers are at Albert Hall, I believe, and we just have time to and get there if we are to he concert."

The follow morning at ten o'clock sharp hansom pulled up before a building of flats in Barrett St and Miss Wimpole joined ve both looked askance at Ho but he leaned forward imperturbably and said to the driver, "Ascot Park, if you please, cabby," and then leaned back smiling.

"Ascot Park?" I asked in astonishment. "The solution to the problem lies at a racing meet?"

"It does indeed, Watney," said Homes, obviously enjoying my mystification. Then he clapped me on the shoulder and said, "Pray forgive my very poor sense of humour, Watney; and you also, Miss Wimpole. I have practically solved the problem, and the solution does indeed lie at Ascot Park. Watney here knows how I love to mystify, but I shall satisfy your curiosity at once.

"When I first decoded the message and found myself with another message almost as curious as the first—namely, Whos On First—I considered it quite carefully for some time. It could have been, of course, some reference to a person or company named Whos which was located on a First Avenue or First Street. While I did not believe this to be true, it is in my nature to be thorough, and since New York is the only city to my knowledge

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with a First Avenue, I cabled my old friend Inspector Queen to take steps. His reply in the negative eliminated this possibility, and I returned to my original thesis.

"Note carefully the last word, which is First. This might, of course, have been an obscure reference to the Bible, in which it is promised that the last shall be first; but in perusing the original message I sensed no religious aura, and I am particularly sensitive to such emanations. No; instead I allowed myself to consider those cases in which it might be important to be first. I do not, of course, refer to queues or anything of that nature. The logical answer, naturally, is in wagering. The various means available to the Englishman of to-day to place a wager are extremely limited, and after checking the team standings and finding Nottingham still firmly in the lead, I turned to the racing news.

"And there I found, as I had honestly expected to find, that in the second race at Ascot to-day the entry of the Abbott Castle stable is a three-year-old filly named Whos On First."

He turned to the young woman at his side. "My dear," said he, "I fear that your uncle is involved in a touting scheme, and that the group with whom he has been meeting of late have been using the telegraph-system to send advices regarding probable winners. This is, of course, frowned upon in most racing circles, but as I have so often stated, I am not of the official police, and therefore feel no responsibility for bringing people to their so-called justice over minor vices. I shall look forward, however, to the proof of my ratiocination at the track in a few moments."

"Oh, Mr. Schlock Homes," cried Miss Wimpole, clasping his hand in gratitude. "You have relieved my mind greatly. I have been so worried, especially since I have accidentally come across large sums of money hidden in obscure places in the house, and feared that my uncle had become involved with some desperate characters engaged in nefarious practices. Now that I am cognizant of the nature of the enterprise, I can relax and may even replace at least a part of these sums with my conscience at rest, knowing that they were not gained through dubious means. But you must let me pay you for your efforts in this matter. Pray tell me what your fee is."

"No, Miss Wimpole," replied Homes simply. "If my theory is as good as I believe it to be, there shall be no question of payment. I shall take as payment the benefits of the information which you yourself were so kind as to bring to my attention."

Within a few minutes our hansom drew up at the ornate gate of the racing meet, and while Homes went to study the posted odds and

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speak with some bookmakers with whom he was acquainted, I purchased the latest journal and retired to the stands to await his return. He was with me in a few minutes, smiling broadly.

"It is even better than I had imagined, Watney," said he. "The diabolical genius of these people arouses my admiration. I note that in addition to Whos On First in the second race, this same Abbott Castle has entered a horse named Whats On Second in the first race. And when I spoke to one of the track stewards just a few moments ago, he informed me that because of rumours which have been flooding the stewards' office they propose to combine the two races. Now, at long last, the true nature of this ingenious plot finally emerges!"

"But what might that be, Homes?" I asked in bewilderment. "Can it be that the stewards have heard of the touting scheme and are using this means to circumvent it?"

"Your faith in track stewards is touching, Watney," said Homes drily. "I am quite convinced that without the aid of one of their members named Joseph, the entire scheme could not have been contemplated. No, no, Watney; the plan is far more intricate. These people know that if they go to a bookmaker with a bet on any one horse to win, the maximum odds which they can expect will be in the nature of five, or at most ten, to one But think, Watney, think! Consider! What would the odds be against a *tie?*"

At once the devilish cleverness of the entire business burst upon my brain. "What do you propose to do, Homes?" I asked, searching his strong face for a clue.

"I have already done it, Watney," he replied calmly, and showed me five separate betting slips, each for the sum of £20, and each to be redeemed at the rate of 200 to 1 should the race end in a tie.

"Well, Watney," said Homes, when we were once again seated comfortably in our rooms in Bagel Street. "I can honestly state that to my mind this was one of my most successful cases—certainly from the financial standpoint. I feel that the ingenuity involved in codifying the betting information, while leaving out certain obvious information, puts our Mr. Wimpole and his associates in a special category of brilliance. We must be thankful that they have selected this relatively harmless means of breaching the law, and not something more nefarious. I certainly do not begrudge him his gains, although I must say that in seeing through their clever scheme, I feel quite justified in keeping mine."

Homes lit his pipe, and when it was pulling to his satisfaction, spoke again. "And now, Watney, we must look for another case to ward off boredom. Is there any

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crime news in that journal which might prove to be of interest?"

"Only this," I said, folding the sheet in half and handing it to Homes with the indicated article on top. "Some three million pounds worth of diamonds were stolen last night from the home of the Japanese ambassador. They were known as the Ogima Diamonds, and were considered the most valuable collection of their type in the world.The article says that the police believe it to be the work of a gang, but that otherwise they are without a clue."

"Ah, really?" murmured Homes, his nostrils distended in a manner which I had long since come to recognize as indicating intense interest. "May I see the article, Watney? Ah, yes! Ogima . . . There is something faintly familiar . . ."

He reached behind himself to the shelf where the reference books were kept, and drawing one out, opened it to the letter O.

"Ogima in Swahili means pencil sharpener," he said, half to himself, "while the same word in ancient Mandarin meant a type of pick used with the one-stringed guitar. No, I doubt if this is of much help; it would be too subtle."

He returned the reference book to the shelf, and studied the article once again. Suddenly his face cleared and he leaned forward excitedly.

"Of course! You will note, Watney, that Ogima spelled backwards, becomes Amigo. I shall be very surprised if the answer to this problem does not lie somewhere south of the border. Watney, your timetable, if you please."

"Q"

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recommended by ANTHONY BOUCHER

Even in a year of many good anthologies, THE LETHAL SEX (Dell, 35¢) is outstanding. Edited by John D. MacDonald for the Mystery Writers of America, it is (I think) unique in presenting 14 stories of crime and suspense, all written by women. And what women (Sheridan, Millar, Tyre, deFord, Potts, Johns . . .) and what stories (4 from EQMM, 7 new to print)! A warm salute to MacDonald and his chilling coven.

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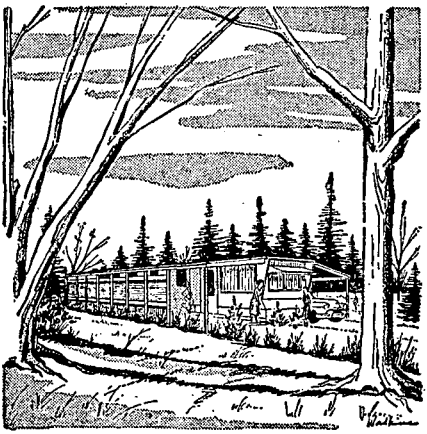

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MURDER ON SKIS

by GORDON GASKILL

(*continued from page 47*)

the mantelpiece and the two mink coats were thrown over chairs. Stanton Pollock played with the tassel of his dressing gown nervously, then said in sharp reproof, "Now perhaps you won't be so careless with your things, Cynthia. We're an obvious enough target as it is, in my business. You make it worse when people learn how careless you are."

Jaeger asked unbelievingly, "You mean that with such valuable things around, you did not even lock the door at night?"

Cynthia looked unnaturally subdued. "We locked our bedroom door, of course," she said, "but—well no, not the outer door, not the one to the corridor." Then she took the offensive. "If that phone girl had only understood me the first time, and if Leslie hadn't scared him away, we might have caught him red-handed."

Jaeger said soberly, "Perhaps it was just as well. A man who kills once doesn't worry about the second time."

Everybody stared at him. Leslie Pollock whispered, "But I thought it was just an ordinary burglar. You think it was the same person who . . ."

The Inspector shrugged. "Perhaps not, but it seems more than a coincidence. Remember, the killer has already been in this suite before—to steal the pistol."

There was a shocked silence. Then the Maharanee shrilled, "I want to get out of this place!" Her husband tried to placate her, and Freddy Schmidt pleaded, "Nothing like this ever happened here before, Your Highness."

"Once is enough!" she snapped, and started back to her suite, her husband behind her.

Shaking his head sadly, Freddy Schmidt said, "Please, Mrs. Currell, let me put all your things in our safe, won't you?" She had to agree. Gradually people went back to bed and the hotel was quiet again.

Jaeger came with me to my own room, a few steps down the corridor. "Speaking of the hotel safe, Colonel, I might as well tell you something. I wasn't going to bother you tonight, but since you're awake anyway . . ."

I was very wide-awake indeed when he finished telling what he had discovered. It seems the Snow Queen has three shifts of desk clerks. The dog-watch man, who lives out in the country, had come on duty at midnight and learned for the first time about Rosemary

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Warden's murder. He had gone straight to Freddy Schmidt to say that, two nights earlier, she had come to him, during his shift, and asked him to put a large sealed envelope in the hotel safe. Schmidt had wakened Jaeger, and they had opened the envelope.

"There were about a dozen letters to her," Jaeger told me. "Very warm ones, too, with talk of marriage. They were written over the past six months—by this man Smithfield."

I stared at him. "And now what?"

He shrugged. "It's a little late to do anything tonight. They're safe enough here, he and his wife; they got in at eleven on the train from Kleine Scheidegg. Tomorrow morning will do."

Next morning I read over the letters. Put together, they told their own story. Scott Smithfield had met Rosemary in Rome, on a business trip without his wife. They must have had quite a time. Then the letters began to talk about marriage, with phrases like "and when we're together forever." . . . "I hate to hurt her, but my dearest darling . . ."

And their meeting in Grindelwald had been no accident. In October he wrote her that Suska had entered the ski tournament that winter, gave the exact dates, and suggested Rosemary come at the same time.

I put the letters down, frowning. Jaeger said softly, "And it's obvious she was afraid of something. Otherwise, why put them in the safe?" He sat back in his chair. "I think it's time we talked to Smithfield."

Scott Smithfield reminded me of a healthy young bull who had grown a little fat from too-rich living. Now he sat, wary and tense, while the Inspector blandly led him into saying he had never seen Rosemary Warden before Grindelwald.

Then Jaeger produced the letters. Smithfield caught his breath sharply, then flushed a dull brick red. "Let me see them!" he said roughly. Jaeger handed them over and Smithfield glanced through them rapidly. "Yes," he said, breathing heavily, "I wrote them. But I wrote other letters, later ones, too. Where are the other letters?"

"There were no others," Jaeger said impassively.

Smithfield lighted a cigarette with trembling hands. "I was only with her a week in Rome, but I was crazy about her, out of my mind. I wanted to marry her, divorce my wife—anything!" He drew deeply on his cigarette, trying to get hold of himself. "Then I went home, back to Suska, and I began to cool off. I remembered things Rosemary had said and done—nasty, mean, cutting things." He made a vague gesture. "We kept writing, but after a while—well, I changed my mind, and told her so. I told her to forget about Grindelwald, too."

Jaeger pointed out, "You didn't

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have to come to Grindelwald if you thought she was still coming."

"Oh no?" Smithfield retorted. "Would you expect me to tell Suska she couldn't enter the tournament because an old flame of mine might turn up?"

The Inspector smiled sardonically. "Once she was here, you didn't try very hard to keep away from her."

Smithfield seemed confused. "Yes, I saw a lot of her here. Near here it was—different. She was very insistent. She still wanted me to divorce Suska. I never would have, though. I wanted no part of that—that—"

Jaeger asked, "Did your wife know anything about this affair?"

"Not a thing!" Smithfield said flatly.

"I notice," the Swiss detective went on, "that you and your wife have separate rooms here."

"So what!" Smithfield flushed. "We have separate rooms at home, too. But we're not—separated, or anything like that."

Jaeger switched his attack. "Did the Warden girl ever try to blackmail you with those letters?"

"No," he said promptly. Then he looked uncertain. "Or maybe I was stupid. I never thought of it as blackmail, anyway. She hinted a couple of times—jokingly—that she could break up our marriage if she wanted to." He fell silent, as if realizing it hadn't been a very funny joke.

"Odd," Jaeger mused, "that she bothered to lock up the letters. Who else knew about them, or would care—except you?"

Smithfield stared at the window. "I don't know. But I didn't kill her. I couldn't have killed her if I'd wanted to."

Jaeger asked harshly, "Where were you around noon yesterday? Oh, I know you and your wife took the 1:10 train up to Kleine Scheidegg. But the girl was killed just after twelve. Where were you then?"

"Skiing down to Grindelwald," Smithfield said sullenly. "On the easy trail from Bort. I'm not much of a skier. I don't know exactly when I was at any one spot. No skier ever does."

"And your wife?"

The American looked at him stonily. "She came down the tough trail. I met her at the hotel—"

Jaeger said, "Thank you, Mr. Smithfield. I'll speak to her myself."

I thought Jaeger was unnecessarily brutal in springing the letters on Suska Smithfield, but it proved to be a dud bombshell.

"No," she said calmly, "I hadn't seen them, but I'm not at all surprised to learn that Scott had—an adventure." She settled back in her chair. "Letters came to the house, in a woman's handwriting. There were one or two long-distance telephone calls. I didn't question him, but when I saw them together here,

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somehow I was sure she was the one."

"You take it very casually," Jaeger frowned.

She pushed back her short-cropped black hair. "You must know, Inspector," she said coolly, "that a European woman doesn't run to the divorce courts quickly."

Then Jaeger fired his second barrel. "The telephone operator at the hotel," he said, "reports Miss Warden telephoned you the night before she was killed."

Suska Smithfield's eyes flamed for a moment. Then she shrugged. "Yes," she admitted. "She said she wanted to talk to me—some place where we wouldn't be seen. I suggested Bort, around noon. She usually came up about then."

"What did she want to discuss with you?" he demanded.

She examined the map on the wall. "She didn't say. I had an idea, of course, and I went there, and waited. You saw me, didn't you, Colonel Bird? And then you told me she had been killed."

"And you left rather hurriedly," Jaeger said.

She kept her temper. "If you like. I had to meet my husband—to take the train up to Kleine Scheidegg. You see, I wasn't in the afternoon race. It was a relay, just for teams, and doesn't count for individual scoring. I'm an individual entrant, not on the American team."

His eyes glinted. "I know you're not. And you're not an American citizen, either. I've seen your 'passport'—a stateless one, for refugees. Not much fun to have one of those, is it?"

"No," she said, still controlling herself. "We've lived in Europe since we were married two years ago. We're going to America in the spring, to start my naturalization."

Jaeger leaned forward. "All very fine—*if* you still had your American husband in the spring!"

"I was sure you'd think that." She seemed almost amused. "It fits so well, doesn't it? Poor refugee girl—afraid of losing her security, her rich American husband, her chance at a real passport—shoots rival. Isn't that it, Inspector?" She looked up with false brightness. "All very well—except that it isn't true. Scott would never have married her, Inspector. I didn't need to use a gun."

When she had gone, I reminded Jaeger of something an old cop once told me in America. "He said police work was mostly the patient pursuit of the obvious, and it's certainly paid off for you, Inspector. This time, the telephone girl."

He nodded. "And that's not all. One of my men found out that this clever Englishman, Blake, had a long talk with the Warden girl the night before she was killed. But not here. In a place called the Monk's Hut, at the other end of town. The owner remembered them." He added, "I've sent for Blake. I want to find out why he lied last night."

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Blake came in, debonair in his trim ski clothes. Jaeger told him bluntly what he had learned, ending grimly, "What have you got to say to that?"

Blake grinned. "I'd say, Inspector, that the Swiss police are very efficient."

Jaeger was not amused. "Why did you lie?" he demanded hotly.

The Englishman frowned. "I didn't lie, Inspector. I told you the truth—if not the whole truth." He leaned back. "You see, more than any other business I know, the jewelry business is based on integrity, on reputation. Partly for my own sake, but mostly for my firm's, I didn't want to be connected with a scandal in any way. Besides, our talk had nothing whatever to do with what happened to her."

"I'll be the judge of that!" Jaeger retorted. "Now tell me what happened—*all* the truth, this time, or you'll be in the middle of the biggest scandal you've ever known."

Blake sighed. Then he smiled, oddly. "First of all, Inspector, perhaps I'd better tell you that I was more or less engaged to her once."

We stared at him. *"Engaged!"* Jaeger echoed.

"I said more or less," the Englishman pointed out carefully. "You see, after the way—well, my wife and I didn't hit it off very well. My fault, I suppose. Then Rosemary came along. She was a newspaperwoman in London for a while, you know. I'd never seen anything like her and I—let's face it, I lost my head." He shifted in his chair. "That did it, of course. My wife got the divorce, and the boy. Quite right, too." He chuckled dryly. "Then my money ran out. Anyway, Rosemary hopped it for Paris and I haven't seen her since—that is, until here."

"You knew she was coming here?" Jaeger stabbed.

"Not a bit of it," Blake said. "I know these coincidences must look odd, but the fact is I came here purely and simply on business—to try to buy the Maharajah's jewels. And that's what she wanted to talk to me about, privately. She said she could make absolutely certain that my firm, not Pollock's, would get the Maharajah's jewels—if we'd make it worth her while."

"How could she insure that?" Jaeger demanded.

Blake smiled. "I've wondered, myself. Of course she wouldn't tell me, unless I agreed to play ball with her. And I wouldn't. I was a bit high and mighty with her, I'm afraid. Honor of the firm, and all that."

Jaeger smiled thinly. "Very laudable. But I imagine the truth is you didn't believe for a minute she could actually do what she offered."

Blake said soberly, "No, I think you're wrong there. I imagine she *could* do it. I imagine she'd found out some sort of scandal. She was clever at that sort of thing. I think she really knew something she could use as a blackjack."

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"On whom?" Jaeger asked quietly.

"I tell you, I don't know. She wasn't fool enough to show her hand, unless I agreed to play along."

Jaeger got no more out of him. "If," he mused after Blake left, "if she broke up his marriage, then ran off and let him—" He fell silent. "Or," he said suddenly, "suppose he didn't turn down her offer. Suppose he accepted it, learned what she knew, and then decided to get rid of her?"

He looked sharply at me, as if trying to make up his mind about something. Then he said abruptly, "I've learned something else, something highly confidential. It may have a vital bearing on what this Englishman just said. But I must have your word to keep it secret."

I said a little stiffly, "All right, if you think it necessary."

Then he told me, and I was completely floored. I knew that Zurich is the banking capital of the Continent, with lines of investigation all over the world. Jaeger had, as a matter of simple routine, asked for a financial report on Pollock & Pender. It had come this morning, and it was bad. The firm, Zurich said, was shaky.

"I can't believe it!" I said. It was like learning Gibraltar is built on a sandbank.

"Maybe," Jaeger said, "the Warden girl knew what she was talking about when she questioned, in that gossip item, whether 'Daddy' could afford a diamond ring. Maybe Pollock *had* to get these jewels, or go under—his last chance to stabilize himself." He paused. "A man so desperate might do anything to save himself. Or someone near him might do it for him."

I made a protesting gesture, but he swept on, "Would Mrs. Currell like to see her brother fail? Or his daughter? Would Caldwell like to have his heiress fiancée turn into a bankrupt's daughter?"

I said firmly, "I think it's wildly far-fetched. As soon as you tell Stanton Pollock—"

"But I'm not going to tell him! Why put him on guard? Enough that I know—that *we* know," Jaeger added, as if to remind me that I had promised silence.

Nothing much happened during the afternoon. If Jaeger's men turned up anything new or startling, he didn't tell me. The gray ski mitten remained unidentified. The police checked the Pollock suite carefully and found no fingerprints of the unknown intruder. Stanton Pollock's pistol was still missing, and the Berne police laboratory phoned to say that the fatal bullet had *not* come from Tom Caldwell's gun.

I skied until late in the afternoon, alone. Then I went to my room and read until nearly time for dinner. I dressed and went down to the lounge.

Cynthia Currell presided over a somewhat isolated group near the

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fireplace. Leslie and Tom Caldwell were talking to each other, rather listelessly. The Smithfields avoided looking at each other. Stanton Pollock stared into the fire.

Cynthia saw me and beckoned. I sat down beside her. "Everybody seems to treat us like lepers," she said grimly. "Not that I blame them, I suppose, but it wasn't *our* fault. To be honest, I think they're more put out by having the moonlight ski-down canceled than by that woman's murder. And I imagine Freddy Schmidt would love to kick us all out, if there were any polite way of doing it."

"Hotelkeepers," I reminded her, "don't usually kick out Indian princes and American millionaires . . . Anyway, here comes Freddy now. You can ask him."

Far from looking irritated, Freddy Schmidt was still apologetic about last night's attempted burglary. "I keep thinking, Mrs. Currell, that if only that phone girl had understood you the first time, we might have caught him in the act."

"Leslie had already scared him off," she pointed out. "Don't blame your girl at all. You've wonderful switchboard girls, Freddy—all the languages they speak!"

He looked pleased. "I get the best I can find. They can handle English, German, French, Italian. But in a place like this—well, I've got some fifteen different nationalities here right now and the girls get pretty flustered with long-distance calls. Just take today, for instance, a typical day. We had calls to Istanbul, Cairo, Bombay, Algiers, Oslo—not counting the usual London, Paris, New York, and Rome calls. You can't expect any operator to handle Turkish and Arabic and Hindustani—or whatever it is they speak in Bombay."

Stanton Pollock and Caldwell seemed suddenly alert. Cynthia Currell said, "Well, you'd never find switchboard girls like that in an American hotel, Freddy. I think they're marvelous—really I do."

He bowed slightly, smiling, and moved off to greet other guests. Almost at the same moment Nigel Blake joined the circle and nearly on his heels came the Maharajah and his wife. The Indian prince sat down, looked around in a calm way, then dropped a bombshell.

He said softly, "I have come to a decision, gentlemen, about my jewels."

There was sudden, utter silence.

"My wife," the Maharajah said with the faintest hint of apology, "has insisted on leaving at once. I have persuaded her to finish out the races, which end tomorrow afternoon. She has done so well in them. She has agreed, not very happily. After that we shall leave at the earliest possible moment—which is Saturday morning."

He looked around blandly. "Thus there is very little time left. This afternoon I made rather complicated arrangements, involving

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the Berne bank, our Indian embassy there, and the Swiss police, to have my jewels brought here under guard."

"Here!" Stanton Pollock stared.

"Yes," the prince said. "Normally, of course, I would go to Berne with the buyer. But I will not, on any account, miss seeing my wife in the final races. And the banks are closed on Saturday and Sunday, naturally. They assure me the jewels will arrive sometime late tomorrow afternoon."

One burning question hung in the air and it was Nigel Blake who finally asked it, "Have you decided, Your Highness, who will get them?"

Bandore smiled faintly. "Yes," he said. "I have."

And that was all he said. We were still staring when the gong sounded for dinner and we filed in silence to our various tables.

After dinner I went to the bar for a cognac. I sat on one of the cushioned benches that encircled the yard-thick columns there and suddenly discovered that I was eavesdropping. On the other side of the pillar Stanton Pollock's voice was saying, "I'm worried, Tom. You heard what Freddy said about a phone call today to Bombay? Well, Blake made that call!"

Tom Caldwell's voice, surprised, asked, "Blake? How do you know?"

"I was getting our mail at the desk near the switchboard when I heard the operator saying, 'Mr. Blake, on your call to Mr. Malik, Long Distance reports he won't be back in the city before Tuesday. Do you wish to cancel your call?' Something like that. Who's Malik, I wonder? Indian name, I suppose."

"Could be," Tom said thoughtfully. "But why should Blake call him?"

"Why, indeed?" Pollock's voice was edged with worry. "It's bound to be something about the Maharajah—too much coincidence, otherwise. I don't like it, Tom. Blake's firm are not fools—"

A couple of loud-voiced guests sat down near me and their voices drowned out the rest of the conversation.

I went up to bed and lay a long time awake, trying to fit all the pieces of the puzzle together.

I slept lightly and fitfully that night. Suddenly I was listening to faint groaning sounds that seemed to come from the next room—Scott Smithfield's room. I ran into the corridor and yanked at his door. It was locked. The next one, his wife's, was not. I pulled it open.

Scott Smithfield stared up at me, his eyes dazed. He was sitting on the bed, holding his wife in his arms. Her head was streaked with blood, her eyes were closed, and she was moaning with pain. One arm, also bloodstained, dangled limply to the floor.

"Somebody hit her!" he gasped.

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"Help me, Colonel! Get a doctor!"

The telephone had been knocked to the floor. So had the bedside lamp. I bent to pick up the phone and saw a heavy glass ashtray near it, smeared with blood, and within touching distance of Suska's fingertips.

The switchboard didn't answer, but in a few moments the night clerk put his frightened face inside the door. "The signal light flashed from this room," he said. "I answered, but there was nobody. After what happened last night—" He stopped and stared at Suska.

"Get back to the switchboard!" I ordered. "Tell Mr. Schmidt. Wake up Inspector Jaeger. And get a doctor—fast!" He vanished.

Suska's wound was bleeding freely, but it seemed shallow. I folded a hand towel, soaked it in cold water, and held it to the wound. She moaned with pain and Smithfield shuddered.

"Get hold of yourself, man!" I told him. "I don't think it's serious."

He looked around, seemed to see the ashtray on the floor for the first time, and started to pick it up.

"Don't!" I said sharply. The bloody smears might be fingerprints.

"Was—was that what hit her?" he asked.

"It could be." It was of rock crystal and very heavy. Every room in the hotel had ashtrays exactly like it.

"What happened?" I asked him bluntly.

"I—I can't tell you much," he fumbled. "I was asleep in my room—we always left the door between a little open. Something woke me up—maybe the phone falling over or the lamp or the ashtray, I don't know. I snapped on the light, ran in here, and found her—like that."

"Didn't you see anybody?"

He shook his head. "But I think I heard a door slam. It must have been that one." He pointed to the door leading to the corridor.

People began arriving: Freddy Schmidt, looking horrified; Inspector Jaeger, grim and angry; finally the doctor. Nobody else. Apparently I was the only one who had heard the noise, which was not loud. The doctor confirmed that the wound was minor, treated it, and left. Suska opened her eyes and Jaeger asked her what happened.

"I—I don't know," she faltered. "I was asleep . . . and then when I woke up, Scott was here and my head hurt." She winced with pain and closed her eyes again.

Smithfield repeated to Jaeger what he had already told me. The Inspector frowned when he heard of the slamming door. "Wasn't it locked?" he demanded.

"Of course!" Smithfield said. "After what happened last night, I made sure it was locked—and mine, too."

Jaeger looked around. "But you didn't lock the doors out to the balcony!"

"Why, no," Smithfield said. "We

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always keep them partly open at night for air. But they only go out to our private balconies."

"Private!" Jaeger said bitterly. He stalked out to the balcony in the moonlight. It was, in effect, one long continuous balcony all the way across the front of the hotel. Each room had its own section marked off, but only by a low wooden railing that anybody could step over easily. He came back into the room.

"Private!" he repeated scornfully. "Anybody could have come straight in here, along that balcony, from any of the other rooms along here, or even from the public bathrooms."

Freddy Schmidt said, "The public baths don't have windows or doors onto the balcony, Inspector. But there are two public doors onto it—one at each end of the corridor."

"Show me!" Jaeger ordered.

We found one of the public doors slightly ajar. Freddy moved his hand instinctively to close it but Jaeger knocked it away. "Maybe fingerprints," he said. "Maybe the same as the ones on that ashtray." He sighed. "But I doubt it. That would be too easy, too much to hope for."

We walked slowly back along the corridor, past the closed doors. Jaeger asked who had the other rooms along here and Freddy listed them, in order. Beginning with the Maharajah's corner suite, there came next my own room, then Scott Smithfield's, his wife's, and Blake's; then, after the public bath, a Brazilian couple, a Greek shipping man, a German steel merchant, and finally Tom Caldwell and the Pollock suite.

"Cozy," Jaeger observed thoughtfully. "Everybody on the same floor."

Back in Suska Smithfield's room he told her husband, "Better take your wife to your room for the rest of the night. And lock the doors—*all* the doors!"

I slept until nearly eleven the next morning. I knocked at the Smithfields' door to find out how Suska was. There was no answer. Puzzled, I went down into the lobby and immediately noticed that the bright *GALA MOONLIGHT SKI-DOWN* sign was up again. I was still staring at it when Freddy Schmidt came by.

"A terrible thing, Colonel!" He shook his head. "I'd never have thought it—never! But better it's over, like a black cloud gone."

"What are you talking about?" I demanded.

He stared. "You mean you don't know that they arrested Mrs. Smithfield for the murder?"

"Mrs. Smithfield!" I echoed, thinking the world had gone crazy.

He shrugged. "Ask the Inspector. He's in my office," Then he pointed to the ski-down sign. "Anyway, that's on again. Jaeger said it was all right now."

"You must be very happy."

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Jaeger looked a little guilty when I came in. "I didn't want to wake you," he said. "Besides, I thought you'd rather not be involved in it."

I sat down heavily in a chair. "Did she confess?"

"Of course not," he said, "but she probably will. And anyway, our Swiss juries aren't stupid."

"But that attack on her last night?"

"A fake," he said. "I think she did it to herself, thinking it would throw off suspicion. But I got to wondering why it had been so light a wound. If somebody had really been after her with that ashtray, it would probably have been fatal. It took some nerve to hit herself with it, but if it worked it was worth it. And it almost did. Those bloody fingerprints on the ashtray were hers."

"Well, it was her ashtray," I pointed out. "And her hand was hanging down near it. In her pain she might have moved and touched it. And how about the slamming door?"

"Did *you* hear any slamming door?" he asked significantly. I shook my head. "Neither did anybody else, except her husband. Or so he says. A very loyal husband. Of course, she'd have unlocked the door from the inside before pulling her act."

Then he grinned. "I'm not playing fair with you, Colonel. All this is enough, but we found the clinching clue. When I put her into her husband's room last night I had a reason. I wanted to search her room."

He held up two gray ski mittens. "The missing mitten was in her drawer; there's no doubt it's the mate of the one we found on the ski slope."

I stared at the mittens. "What does she say to that?"

"Nothing," he said, "but the loyal husband says they're his. He has a pretty story. He says he was in his own room lying down when the Warden girl called his wife to make that appointment in Bort, only his wife didn't know he was there. The door was open and he heard about the appointment. He didn't say anything to his wife, but he didn't want the two women to talk, either. So he hung around the edge of the woods up there where we found the mitten. His plan was to wait until the Warden girl came up and then to walk innocently up to them. With him there he thought Miss Warden wouldn't dare talk. He waited and saw the Warden girl come up, but as the chair-lift went by he saw she was—well, at least badly hurt. He got panicky and went off downhill. Anyway, that's his story."

I said thoughtfully, "Those tracks up there were dub's tracks, like his."

"But remember the herringbones," Jaeger pointed out triumphantly. "Suska Smithfield was one of the few skiers here good enough to have made them, wasn't she?"

"Yes," I said slowly. "She was."

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"And her motive," he went on, "is the best of the lot. Maybe you don't know, Colonel, what it's like to be a refugee in Europe without a real passport. No nation wants you; nobody will give you a visa or even a job. Everything changed when she married Smithfield. Suddenly she had security, status, and soon would have a real American passport. Then the Warden girl came along and endangered everything. With her whole world about to collapse Mrs. Smithfield acted."

The telephone shrilled. It was Berne, and the conversation had to do with shifting Suska Smithfield from the local jail to the capital. I went out.

I didn't want to see anyone, not just then. I wanted to think, to get away from questions. I went skiing alone and then watched the last race of the tournament, the downhill. The Maharanee placed second, which gave her third place in the final individual standings. Suska might have edged her out, I thought.

When I got back to the Snow Queen it was late and the lobby was a laughing madhouse. The Berne costumer had brought up piles of fancy dress and everybody was pawing them over excitedly. I was in no gala frame of mind, but there was no use sulking, either. I went into the melee, too, and found the only thing that would fit me—a Spanish bullfighter's costume.

I still had it under my arm when Jaeger hunted me up. "The police car just got here with the Maharajah's jewels," he said, rather flustered. "I'm in charge of them. Can you go up with me?"

Four armed policemen, one of them gingerly carrying a small package heavy with seals, went with us up to the Maharajah's suite. He was there with his wife, and Stanton Pollock, Tom Caldwell, and Nigel Blake were standing stiffly to one side.

I whispered to Pollock, "Who gets the jewels?"

He whispered back tensely, "He hasn't said yet."

The prince ripped open the seals and dumped the contents of the package on the table. Every eye in the room stared at the glittering heap of diamonds, gleaming sapphires, emeralds, flashing rubies.

The tension was almost unbearable, but the Maharajah seemed to enjoy it. "Frankly, gentlemen," he said, "I have not been able to make up my mind between your firms. So I have decided on the only course possible. You may share the jewels, in equal parts, each of you paying me one million dollars or the sterling equivalent. Do you agree?"

My eyes left the jewels to watch Stanton Pollock's face. I thought I saw the faintest hint of relief; if the Zurich report was true, even half the jewels would give him a reprieve. He nodded.

Nigel Blake also agreed. "Half a

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loaf," he murmured. "But how will we divide them to suit both sides?"

The Maharajah smiled. "By an old Indian system. You've both seen the jewels before, of course, and know them almost by heart. One of you will divide the jewels into two lots which he considers equal. But the *other* will have first choice of the lots. Agreed?"

We watched, fascinated, as they tossed a coin. Pollock won and elected to let Blake divide them. The Englishman did it with surprising speed, seeming hardly to look at each gem; then he stepped back and bowed to Pollock. "Your choice, sir!"

Pollock, with hardly a moment's hesitation, pointed. "That one."

And that was that. The two piles were made into separate packages and sent down to the hotel safe, still under police guard. The Maharajah of Bandore served champagne to celebrate the sale and promised more for the midnight supper. He seemed more pleased by his wife's placing in the ski tournament than by getting two million in cash.

In my room I felt like a fool squeezing into the bullfighter's costume, but down in the lobby it was better. Everybody else looked just as silly. I could recognize almost no one. Nearly everybody wore full head masks, which were a complete disguise, and many talked in false voices to conceal identities.

We began straggling up the street to the ski lift in the icy moonlit air. I glanced back a moment to the top floor of the hotel, where room lights marked the presence of the non-skiers who had stayed behind. The Maharajah, Caldwell, and, I assumed, Scott Smithfield. No one had seen him all afternoon; he had spent the morning calling the American Embassy in Berne, hiring lawyers to defend Suska.

My companion in the chair-lift, dressed as Louis XIV, chattered in Spanish all the way and didn't seem to mind when I made no answers. We swung up over the dark shadows of the Devil's Doorstep, past the black mass of spruce that had hidden Rosemary Warden's murderer, and came finally into Bort.

Here was another surprise, and a pleasant one. Freddy Schmidt had had the little terrace restaurant there opened for us, with great bowls of hot rum punch waiting.

A figure wearing a pig's-head mask pushed up to the punch bowl where I stood, and drank down a cup. "I needed that!" the British voice of Nigel Blake said gratefully. "That *is* you, isn't it, Bird?"

"How did you know?" I asked.

He laughed. "Oh, I know your walk by now. But I can't pick out many of the others, can you?"

I couldn't. In the flooding moonlight the laughing, pushing crowd looked even more fantastic. There were a pirate, a Moorish warrior, a leering devil, a wolf, a Red Riding

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Hood, two or three Harlequins, an angel, and dozens more.

"Everybody pretends to hate fancy dress," Blake said, "but it's really rather fun, isn't it? I'm probably a fool to be here. I can just barely make it down this trail with three tumbles by daylight. They say it's much trickier at night, even with moonlight. Entirely different perspective."

The Moorish warrior tapped on the punch bowl and turned out to be Freddy Schmidt. "We're all here and about ready to go," he said. He gave some final instructions: not to leave the main trail, not to go too fast, to watch out for the Devil's Doorstep. "Even you, *Monsieur le Diable*," he said, laughing, to the one in devil's guise.

He explained that one experienced guide would lead off and that another would bring up the rear, to make sure nobody needed help. Then we were off.

It was an unforgettable experience. In the glittering moonlight the great spreading flanks of the mountain were like fairyland. I wanted to let myself go, faster and faster but I deliberately slowed down, stopping sometimes, to stretch out the pleasure longer. Some people disregarded Freddy's instructions and swooped far out from the main trail, then came weaving in again and off to the other side. Once I saw Nigel Blake fall and, laughing, being helped back to his feet again.

Near the Devil's Doorstep the trail detoured far to the left, then narrowed. I saw a man standing by the warning barricades, swinging a red lantern. Freddy was taking no chances. The trail became only a few meters wide, following a stream bed, among spruce clumps and dark boulders. Then, below this, it widened out again and, far too soon, I saw the lights of Grindelwald.

I was among the last to get to the Monk's Hut, which was already jammed. Freddy Schmidt, his mask off, stood by the door, greeting his returning guests.

At another time I might have yawned at the peasant dances Freddy had arranged. But tonight, in the old building high in the Alps, they seemed exactly right. There was a lot of noise and shouting and the accordions went crazy. We drank wine, hot and spiced, and ate long grilled peasant sausages. I discovered that Little Red Riding Hood was Leslie, that the wolf was Cynthia Currell, and Stanton Pollock was a monk. The stay-at-homes finally turned up—Tom Caldwell as a Viking, the Maharajah in a sheik's costume. Scott Smithfield, I was certain, hadn't come. Or if he did, his costume was a perfect disguise.

Just before midnight everybody went on down to the Snow Queen and at the stroke of twelve all the masks came off and the gala really began. The Maharajah tapped on his glass and made a little speech. "This is the first time in history,"

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he beamed, "that an entrant from my country has placed in this famous tournament. I shall be most grateful if you will all join a very proud husband in celebrating this happy event." When he finished, waiters brought in a bottle of champagne for every guest and the smiling Maharajah answered cheers and toasts from all parts of the room.

Freddy Schmidt came up to me, unobtrusively, worried. "Don't tell anybody yet," he said, "but we can't find Blake anywhere. The clean-up guide swears there's nobody left behind on the trail. I've sent two guides back up to make sure. The Inspector knows, of course."

I said, "He was wearing a pig costume. I talked to him just before the start. As a matter of fact, I saw him just above the Narrows, too. He'd just fallen down, but he was all right. Somebody was helping him up again. By the way, I didn't notice any pig costume at the Monk's House, did you?"

Freddy shook his head slowly. "No." He went off, a bleak expression on his face.

The two guides stayed on the mountain until about 2:30, then came back to report they had not found Blake. Schmidt cross-examined them sharply. "And you checked everything—the Devil's Doorstep, too?"

"But naturally," one guide said. "Nothing there. The snow is untouched." He shrugged unhappily. "There is nothing more we can do tonight."

"Maybe," I suggested, "Blake simply went off somewhere by himself. He sometimes does that, you know."

"Maybe," Schmidt said, but without much hope in his voice.

The hotel owner woke me at eight the next morning. "Sorry," he said, "but the Inspector wants you. Blake didn't turn up. They're going to use the Duchess."

"The Duchess?" I echoed blankly.

"Our avalanche dog," he explained. "Every valley has one—to find bodies after an avalanche . . ."

Once again we stood at Bort—Jaeger and I, the guide and the Duchess, who was trembling with excitement. The Duchess was a female police dog. All avalanche dogs were, the guide explained; for some reason they were better at finding bodies, dead or alive. "A wonderful dog!" the guide said proudly, patting her. "Already she has saved fourteen lives."

"I'm afraid," Jaeger said grimly, "this won't be the fifteenth. Even if she finds him, he'll be frozen to death after a night out there." He stared down at the vast expanse of snow. "Well, let's go."

We skied swiftly down to the spot, just above the Narrows, where I had last seen Blake. Then we went more slowly, with the Duchess casting back and forth eagerly

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across the trail. Gradually we moved into the Narrows, with its looming rocks and spruce undergrowth.

"Look!" Jaeger said suddenly. The dog was whining with excitement, pawing at a spot where the snow was disturbed, as if a beginning skier had taken a sprawling fall. We took off our skis, sinking knee-deep in the snow, and began to dig with our hands.

It did not take long before we found the smashed pig's-head mask, its grin suddenly horrible now. Nigel Blake lay contorted, frozen stiff, his face caught in horror, dark and bulging.

"Strangled!" Jaeger breathed. He bent over the body, examining it. From the roomy pockets of the dead man's ski jacket he pulled out something that gleamed dully. The missing .375 Magnum pistol.

The Snow Queen was nearly deserted when I headed up toward my room at noon. I was tired, worn out from my session with Jaeger. We had puzzled out *how* Blake had probably been murdered. Unsteady on skis, he had been an easy victim. He would have been a late straggler. Somebody had probably stalked him into the Narrows, knocked him over, strangled him, then pulled him out of sight behind a rock or bush, before the clean-up guide went by. The killer must then have buried him in the snow, expecting the body would not be found until the spring thaws. Not knowing, of course, about the Duchess.

But why? Why had Blake taken the pistol? To kill somebody else? But a shot would be heard too clearly. To protect himself—but from whom? And were there two killers or one? We had the questions, but no reasonable answers.

Passing Cynthia Currell's suite I saw the door open and stopped, puzzled. Then I walked in to find two maids cleaning the suite, but nobody else. At least Cynthia had learned something, I thought. There were no valuables around to tempt burglars.

Except one, I noticed. I looked at it, frowning, then went closer and examined it carefully. I stared at it a long time. Then I went to the phone. "Find Inspector Jaeger," I told the desk clerk, "and ask him to come up here at once."

As our lift-chairs were hauled slowly into the top station, at First, the orange-jacketed ski patrolman always on duty there, sweeping the slopes with binoculars to see if anyone needs help, looked at us curiously. Jaeger and I sat together; behind us were two policemen, looking grim, their hands on their pistols.

We got out of the lift and set off on the path toward the crowded sun terrace.

I've often wondered exactly how the killer knew the game was fin-

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ished, whether he meant it to end as it did, and what would have happened if he'd not had his skis on. Anyway, there was a sudden flash of skis and a black-clad figure went hurtling down the steep slope.

"Get him!" Jaeger roared.

The ski patrolman reacted first. He hurled his binoculars into the snow and was off in pursuit before the crowd on the terrace could catch its breath.

I picked up the binoculars and focused down the mountain on the two racing figures: the patrolman in orange, his quarry in black.

Down, down, they sped, like champions. Black was heading for the striped warning barricades above the Devil's Doorstep, slithering between them, hardly slackening speed. Orange stopped now. But Black went on, faster, straighter to the edge. And over it . . .

Much later I slumped in Cynthia Currell's suite. "He lived about two hours," I said softly. "He told everything—said goodbye to Leslie."

She patted my hand. "Don't take it so hard. She's sleeping now—the doctor gave her something. She's young—she'll get over it. Think how much worse it would have been if she'd actually married him."

Stanton Pollock nodded. "Can you tell us how it all happened?"

"Yes," I said. I'd pieced it all together—from what Jaeger had found out, from what I knew myself, from what Caldwell had told me, dying.

"It began two years ago," I said, "with that jewel auction in Cairo, the Karinoff jewels. You thought Tom had been tricked into bidding too much. He hadn't. He'd done it deliberately. He split the extra money—your money—with the Egyptians who had suggested the deal. He made a lot of money for himself."

"Tom did that to *me*?"

"I'm sorry, but he did. He knew what you'd say, and do, if you ever found out. You can imagine his feelings when he found that Rosemary Warden had dug up the story somewhere: He saw her by accident on the train coming here last Friday—remember? She told him she'd let the story out, ruin him and his marriage, unless he paid her plenty.

"He said he would pay—after the marriage. But he didn't trust her. He knew her tongue, knew he'd never be safe as long as she lived. He was clever; he knew the murder would have to have something to do with skiing, and that he'd never be suspected if everybody thought he was a novice. Not even you people knew he could ski and ski expertly. So he started taking lessons, floundering and falling.

"And it worked. To confuse things he stole your gun, Pollock. He got off the lift at Bort, went down to the hummock to wait and kill Rosemary, then down to Oberhaus to catch the lift back up to have lunch with Leslie. Everybody 'knew' he was a dub; nobody

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dreamed he could have done it."

"But why kill Blake?"

"Blake was getting suspicious," I went on. "He knew the Cairo deal had been rigged, but he wasn't the kind of man to talk without proof. He tried to make sure. There's a playboy in Cairo who knows everything that goes on. Blake knew him, and Caldwell did, too. An Egyptian named Malik."

"Cairo!" Pollock said. "I thought he called Bombay!"

"And Tom let you think that," I said. "You assumed Malik was an Indian name and Tom didn't correct that impression. Unluckily for Blake, Malik was out of town until Tuesday and Tom thought he was safe until then. But he had to act fast . . . Jaeger, by the way, got the Egyptian police to hunt up Malik, in Beirut, and he confirmed the story about the rigged auction . . . So Tom tried to kill Blake Thursday night, but he got Suska Smithfield instead—by miscounting."

"Miscounting!" Cynthia echoed blankly.

"On the corridor, Blake's room is the fifth door down from Tom's own. He assumed it would be the same on the balcony, too. But the public bath comes in between, with no door, and from the balcony the fifth door down is Suska's, not Blake's. It was dark, the rooms are alike, and he realized his mistake too late. But not too late to pull his punch in the last split second, when he recognized her. He unlocked the hall door to cover his exit by the balcony.

"He finally got Blake in the ski-down, figuring correctly that as a poor skier he'd be among the last. He killed him and planted the gun on him . . . Tom took two costumes, but in all the confusion nobody noticed. We thought he was back in the hotel all the time, but he was right along with us—in a devil's costume. He stalked Blake, killed him, then went straight to the hotel, still unrecognized in the devil's suit. He changed to the Viking costume, called for the Maharajah, and they came together to the Monk's Hut. Nobody suspected."

Cynthia said, sighing, "But it all hinged on one thing—that you found out he was really a wonderful skier. How did you discover that?"

I went to the heavy gold frame with Tom's photograph.

"He'd seen me glancing at it. He suddenly realized that if I looked carefully I'd find out everything. That's why he tried to steal it that night, along with so many of your jewels and valuables that nobody would notice the photograph especially."

I tapped the left shoulder of the man in the frame.

"It's not very sharp," I said, "but even so, I should have recognized the shoulder patch of our 13th Mountain Division. And every man in an American mountain division quite logically is a crack skier."

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EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR: **JACQUES GILLIES**

TITLE: ***Mission Accomplished***

TYPE: Secret Police

LOCALE: In darkest Europe

TIME: The Present

COMMENTS: *There are places on this earth where people do not dare to ask questions, where they obey orders without protest . . .*

SINCE LUNCH TIME HE HAD SAT alone at the pavement table, an untouched glass of slivovitz in front of him, waiting for them to come. The few card players had long since drifted away and now, across the other side of the Makart-Platz, a party of fresh-faced American tourists was busy photographing the painted clock.

He watched them with the idle detachment of a man who had never wanted to store up his memories in a camera, a man for whom the past never went beyond the drink just finished, the word just uttered.

The Americans were turning to come back again when the travel-stained black Mercedes swerved suddenly in front of them and drew up at the curb. He stood up then, swallowing his drink at a gulp, and as he crossed the pavement toward the car he said to himself as he always did, "This is the last time."

The rear door opened a few inches and a voice from inside said harshly, "Herr Kleinert?"

He entered the car hurriedly and it was already moving off before the door had slammed, speeding on toward Vienna. The man who had spoken was slumped in the corner with a hand pressed deep in his pocket. He was dressed in somber mourning, with a black rosette pinned to his hatband.

Kleinert said uncertainly, *"Es tut mir sehr leid . . .* I'm sorry you have . . ."

A hand flapped impatiently to silence him. Many people had died in Lieutenant Krull's life but he had yet to mourn them. He was dressed as he was because he had crossed the frontier from Hungary with the members of a funeral party

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and in two short hours he would return the same way.

Kleinert looked at the two stolid figures in the front seat and then back at Krull. He moistened his lips. "I advertised the apartment a month ago. I said it was cheap and near the university. There were over a hundred replies but he didn't answer until after the third insertion. He's been there two weeks now."

Krull said wearily, "The key."

Kleinert was still. "First there is the matter of my payment." In a futile way he had laced his hands together in his lap but still they trembled visibly. "You see there have been heavy expenses and . . ."

"How much?"

"We agreed on twenty thousand schillings."

Krull snapped his fingers and the man beside the driver turned quickly and passed him a small package. Krull dropped it in Kleinert's lap and left his hand there, open. As Kleinert took the key from his fob pocket and gave it to him, the car was already crossing the Roten Armee Bridge.

Kleinert's hands tore softly at the package and he said eagerly, "He goes straight there from the university every afternoon." Now that the harvest was in his hands, the seeds of guilt were forgotten. "Twice I followed him to make certain. You'll have no trouble."

Krull's tired eyes met those of the driver in the rear-view mirror and he nodded. A few minutes later they drew up suddenly by the opera house on the corner of Kärntnerstrasse. Kleinert looked up curiously. Nobody spoke to him and in the heavy silence he felt clumsily for the door handle. Getting out he looked back at them with the mechanical smile of a man who has resigned his soul, and a moment later he was lost in the crowd.

As the car drew away, the driver spat noisily out his window.

They sped on, around the Ring, and passed the university itself. Ten minutes later the car came to rest in a quiet street of yellowstone apartment houses, and the driver waited while Krull and the other man left the car and went quickly up the steps. There was dust on the windows of the small office inside where, in better days, a concierge had sat and Krull went past it and on, up the flight of dark stairs, his hand still rammed in his pocket. He didn't stop until he reached the third door along the top landing where a newly printed card said, *Doktor P. N. Verres.*

Quickly he fitted the key and they went in. The furniture was worn and heavy, and among the books and notes on the mahogany table a tortoiseshell cat lay as heavy as a paperweight. Krull twitched aside the curtain which gave into a small kitchenette, motioning the other man to stand there; then he walked back to wait against the wall behind the door.

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The cat stretched and began licking its paw fastidiously, and a wooden Alpine clock loudly ticked off the minutes. Krull's shoulders sagged against the wall and the hand in his pocket was clenched and sweaty. He had no gun there—the hand in the pocket was a mannerism which had come to him over the last two years, as if the hand somehow had its own sense of guilt and just wanted to stay there, out of sight.

Nearly twenty minutes passed before they heard the scrape of feet and a tune half sung, half spoken. A key turned and the old man came in slowly. Immediately the cat dropped gracefully from the table and went to frisk about his feet. He spoke to it softly, moving around the room in a familiar routine, closing the long window, opening the damper in the small porcelain stove in the corner. The cat pressed against him, playing pat-a-cake with its paws on the lid of the basket he was carrying.

"Ah, ha, Trudi . . . she has smelled something good . . . or she has remembered that it is Tuesday. Patience!" He set the basket on the table, put some mail down beside it. "A carp's head all the way from Lake Neusiedler is not a treat to be hurried." He was turning away when he saw Krull.

For a long time they stared at each other. The old man brought a hand to his mouth, let it fall again. "What . . . do you want?"

Krull said quietly, "We want you to come with us." He watched the thin figure retreat into the shadow until his face was no more than the pale gleam of sweat on his upper lip.

"And if I . . . don't want to come?"

"Your country needs you." Krull's voice was admonishing; the voice of a governess to a naughty child. "Either you will come with us quietly or else . . ." The ticking of the wooden clock filled the pause before he added, "One way or another we'll make a good patriot of you."

The old man looked out the window at the bright afternoon and then back at Krull again. *"Ich verstehe.* If I could just feed my cat . . ."

Krull shook his head wearily and the other man came out from behind the curtain. In silence they took the frail figure by the elbows and walked him out between them, down the dusty stairway to the car. A minute later it was speeding through Vienna, on the road that led through the sunny vineyards to the east.

It was early evening when the funeral cortege crawled slowly up to the frontier post. The glass hearse was drawn by horses in black plumes and purple trappings, and the Mercedes followed close behind it with Krull, now alone, in the back.

They were nearly up to the red

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and white barrier pole when a gypsy cart rattled ahead of them. The guards left the blockhouse and stared curiously at the procession as they turned over the straw in the cart. Krull leaned forward suddenly, across the driver, and pumped the two-tone hooter impatiently. The dark-skinned gypsies waved derisively and one of them, who had drawn a cup of wine from the long cask tied to the back of the cart, threw the dregs insolently under the hearse. Then at last the weighted pole rose slowly.

As the cart rattled off across the mile of no-man's-land, the guards came back watchfully toward the hearse. They ordered the undertaker's men from the box and Krull suddenly left the car and walked toward them, his sick hand still plunged in his pocket. "Do the dead need permits then?"

The guards didn't answer him but continued calmly pushing their hands among the wreaths. From a car somewhere behind, a woman's voice began to wail incessantly.

Krull took the shoulder of the man nearest him. *"Wie lange?* Haven't we grief enough?"

The man turned without anger. "You understand . . . we are only doing our duty."

Already the coffin was half drawn out on its castors. Krull watched as they raised the lid. The face of the corpse was collapsed, vacant in the purity of death.

Krull continued to stand there, his head bent, as the guards slid the casket back, then moved away to examine the cars and the papers of the mourners.

In fifteen minutes it was over and they were crossing the frontier toward the other pole—the red, green, and white one. It was raised as they approached and a man in ill-fitting uniform didn't even stop eating his sandwich as he waved them through. A mile farther on, the hearse turned off into a quiet lane, raising feathers of white dust, and the Mercedes accelerated at last and left the cortege behind.

After five minutes they coasted to a halt behind the gypsy cart, where the dark, wiry men had already slipped the long wine cask from its ropes. The old man inside the cask was still too dazed to climb out; he was slumped against the inner rim and one of the gypsies was draining the bottle which had been fastened to the inside of the cask and to which a tap had been fixed on the outside. As they lifted the old man out and walked him slowly to the waiting Mercedes, two cars swept by toward the west, their lights pale in the fading day.

The old man slept during the hundred-mile drive. Beside him Krull watched the night sky endlessly repeating itself in the smooth waters of the Danube, but the infinity of those winking stars meant nothing to him, for he lived only in the present. Except for that hand.

They drove swiftly through

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Buda, across the Danube again by the Margaret Bridge, and down Szent Istvan Street. Halfway along it they turned off and drew up at a special headquarters of the secret police. There were few people in the street as they left the car and went into the building.

In the hallway Krull threw out a hand to stop the others and went on through a baize-covered door alone. The light from a desk lamp just reached the Major's insignia mounted on the green epaulettes of the A.V.H. His face was in the shadow.

Krull waited, his hand stretching his pocket, until the scratch of the Major's pen stopped. One day, Krull thought, he would sit at a desk like that and make other people wait. In the last few hours he had brought that day a little nearer.

The Major didn't remove his amber holder from between his clenched teeth. "Sit down, Krull. Successful?"

Krull dropped into a leather chair. "The professor is outside." He crushed the black hat on his knee, flicked the rosette away with a square finger. "The frontier business was simple. Those Austrian fools always go for the obvious—they couldn't resist the hearse and coffin when they saw it." Then he added crisply, almost indignantly, "They should learn to check everything! If they'd been in my detachment I'd have them shot."

"They are only human," said the Major ironically, but Krull couldn't see whether he was smiling or not. "Bring Verres in. It's been many years since . . ."

Krull held the door open and the old man came slowly passed him and stood there blinking. The Major stared at him for a long time in silence.

At last he said, "What is your name?"

"Gellmann, Herr Major."

The whisper made Krull's hand convulse in his pocket. "But . . ."

"Be quiet, Krull." The Major exhaled smoke in a swirling cloud around the desk lamp. "What were you doing in the professor's apartment, Herr Gellmann?"

"I go there every afternoon," said the old man simply, "to prepare his supper and tidy the place before he comes back from the university. He lets me keep my cat there, you see—he has been very kind."

"When you return to Vienna," said the Major, "give the professor my warmest regards and tell him I was sorry that we did not meet. Tell him that an old pupil of his, Major Lukas, said that. Meanwhile you will wait outside."

Krull stood there stiffly, a muscle jumping uncontrollably in his eyelid.

The Major said, "Well, Krull, have you anything to say?"

When Krull didn't answer, the Major went on, "You were full of suggestions a moment ago. You

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said, if I remember, that people should learn to check everything and not go for the obvious." He paused. "And that if the Austrian guards had been in your detachment they would have been shot."

Krull's lips were pressed together, white at the corners. The Major opened a file on his desk and said conversationally, "We always throw the small fish back, so you will take that old man back to the frontier now and release him. Then you will return to me."

Krull turned about abruptly. As he was about to go through the door the Major added casually, "Oh . . . and by the way, I shouldn't bother to change your mourning clothes."

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EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR: **MARJORIE CARLETON**

TITLE: ***The Voice of the Heart***

TYPE: Crime Story

LOCALE: Sicily

TIME: The Present

COMMENTS: *Their paths crossed in Sicily on the last night of Carnivale—little Mr. Allify, fastidious and ascetic, and Mrs. Bromley, fifty and heart-weary—their paths met in a moment of horror . . . A distinguished story.*

SINCE I'VE BEEN ASSIGNED TO DO AN impressionistic version of the Bromley-Allify case, my own slant should be clear from the start.

I have no belief whatever in predestination, and very little in most alleged instances of telepathy. That's as far as I'll go—and it's a lot farther than I would have gone five weeks ago. Frankly, I still can't feel that Mrs. Bromley was of any particular importance in the scheme of things. Or Mr. Allify, either. Perhaps that's simply my ignorance. Last year, when I wrote up the Ladenbrook poltergeist, one indignant Spiritualist charged that I refused to admit the existence of air currents because I saw only the insignificance of the autumn leaves that were ruffled by them.

Maybe so. Admittedly there's no instrument to measure a wind that has passed. But just remember that I'm not a research scientist, only a free-lance feature writer, with a sprained but not crippled regard for the truth.

There is some embroidery of fancy here. There had to be, since killer and killed were alone most of the evening in question. But there is no distortion of fact. Mr. Allify's conversation with his wife was overheard by three witnesses—the Christian majordomo and the two little Moslem maids. (This will surprise no one who is familiar with

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Eastern households.) And Mrs. Bromley's last letter from Sicily was found by the hotel manager less than five minutes after her hand had fallen from it. It could not have been faked later on.

I have talked with everyone even remotely connected with the case, with a single and obvious exception: though I've been in and out of tough places, I have yet to acquire the knack of crossing the Styx and returning with a whole skin.

Elsewhere, due acknowledgment is made to the police for their cooperation, as well as to M. l'Abbé Drouet of Nicosia for his kindness in arranging the convent interview and for his services as interpreter. My languages do not include Arabic.

To those who prefer the unadorned facts, I recommend the excellent news coverage in *Paris-Presse* and *Il Corriere*. But I write this in my own way. That, after all, is the assignment . . .

The freighter had docked but Mr. Allify was still in his cabin with its small private deck. That privacy was not a self-important flourish, for he was a modest man. But he had learned very early that while he was eagerly sought in business matters, he was never desired as friend. In his youth, the fact had bewildered and wounded him. Now, in the fulfillment of a long and perfect marriage, he could accept it with quiet dignity and indifference.

There were cablegrams on his desk but he ignored them. First things first. He sat down and began to search through the many pockets of the ancient trench coat. It was a mongrel but convenient garment, made for him many years ago by a Beirut tailor; and despite his wife's objections he refused to discard it, though in deference to those protests he used it only when traveling.

Wide or narrow, open or hidden, the multiple pockets began to disgorge. Letters, memos, invoices, cablegrams. Nothing else. He hoped that would remain the case. Last year some Carnivale jester had hidden a knotted nylon stocking in one pocket. And the year before, there had been the heel of a woman's shoe, the protruding nails bent and rusty. And in other years, other objects equally trivial, equally affronting to a temperament both fastidious and ascetic.

He called out in answer to a knock on the door. It was the purser with a wire from Madam Allify and the usual précis of news from the radio shack. When the man had left, Mr. Allify put aside the wire from his wife—not carelessly, but as a child saves the frosting of a cake. He picked up the typed news summary:

Electric storms building in the east . . . Cyprus calm at the moment . . . Cairo radio savagely attacks colonial imperialists . . .

In other words, everything normal. Mr. Allify's spirits lifted. In re-

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cent years disagreeable things happened too often during the Sicilian Carnivale, so that one left the island with a bitter taste in the mouth. Last year, that poor young girl strangled with her own hose near Catania; and before that, less printable tragedies, almost maniacal in nature.

His sage forehead twisted. It is the wine, he thought, the wine Sicilians are too thrifty to drink in quantity except during Carnivale; so that those men who hide dark strange things in their hearts become something lower than the beasts of their fields, when the wine unleashes them . . . But perhaps he was being unfair. Perhaps the prohibitions of his childhood faith were still deep in him, though he had long since discarded the outward observance. It was already twilight but he had not even glanced toward the East.

He did not do so now. Instead, he rose and looked in the mirror. There was something of twilight in his face too, the grayness of a kidney ailment and the pallor of fatigue. Because of his ailment, wine didn't agree with Mr. Allify either. He drank it only during this annual Sicilian trip, an obligatory gesture since a crowded itinerary forced him to do business during Carnivale. It sent him into a heavy stupor from which he always awoke in his hotel bedroom, tired and unrefreshed, and recollecting little of what happened after his business conferences were concluded and his guests had hurried away.

They always did hurry away, he acknowledged without rancor. And tonight he would plan an early bedtime. Last year he must have gone to the cinema, for he could still recall lurid flashes of light springing from the screen in the dark auditorium. But what the picture had been about, he hadn't the slightest idea, though Miriam had pressed him. Too many of his wife's pleasures were vicarious, he thought with sudden tenderness—and an equal pride that her adoption of Christianity had not altered her womanly refusal to go anywhere without his escort.

He would try to avoid the wine tonight, and praise Allah it was the last evening of Carnivale. A plane from Palermo tomorrow and he could be with Miriam for dinner. He picked up her wire. It was the usual message, tender, loving. Miriam, he thought—or Mariam or Mariem—a name sacred alike to Moslem, Jew, or Christian. His Miriam had become a Christian just this year. She would be facing tomorrow's first Lenten morning with a calm heart and a humility she had not earned, but which became her as a bride's veil softens the flashing eye.

He smiled a little at the last line of her wire: *Remember my promise*. He remembered it. He always came home from Sicily ill and depressed. So when he left this time,

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she had said, "You will not return again in such illness, my beloved. My voice will reach across the miles to you. And if you are too far gone in wine to listen—then those through whom you might come to harm shall hear me. This I promise."

"There will not be too much wine." And to lift the somber look from her eyes, he had added teasingly, "Besides, those with whom I do business do not understand Arabic, so you will have to speak to me—a proper thing for a proper wife!"

"Arabic is the voice of the heart and not merely a word on the tongue," she rebuked. But then she had laughed too and looked contentedly at his smart blue topcoat. "At least you have discarded that wretched trench coat. In it, you were some great evil bird, not my dear one."

Now Mr. Allify looked rather guiltily at that same black trench coat flapping over his arm. But it was a very convenient coat for a forgetful man who carried many papers. What was it the long-dead tailor had said? Oh, yes, the old platitude: that to each man Allah measures his cloth at birth—but within that measure, a man is free to fashion his own cloak according to the intentions of his heart. Or his business, Mr. Allify amended. The coat had served him well. Nothing had ever been lost from it; and if extraneous objects had been added —well, the Sicilian was a child in his love of senseless practical jokes.

As he went down the gangplank toward the rented car in the square, the Captain saluted him with the usual respect. And looked after him with the usual speculation. Mr. Allify was justly renowned throughout the Mediterranean littoral as one of those rare businessmen who are not only shrewd but shrewdly honest. And he had many businesses: groves in Sicily, hotels in Algiers and Cairo, an oil refinery here, a shipping line there—including this very freighter.

His devotion to his childless wife was equally well-known. But here accurate knowledge ceased. He was a resident of Cyprus, but Greek Cypriots claimed he was Turkish and the Turks asserted he was Moroccan. The British acknowledged that he held a British passport but justly observed that his name was not British in derivation. Odd, the Captain thought, that a man so universally respected should be so universally—well, disclaimed.

The car, an ancient but reliable one, was waiting. The driver touched his cap and departed. Mr. Allify tossed his light bag into the tonneau. The last of the sunset was streaking toward the west. Even as he watched, the rose and amber were vanishing from the shabby plaster houses. Shadows raced across the tiny cobbled square and the air was suddenly sea-damp though not cold.

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He stood irresolutely, then slipped into the trench coat. It clung as comfortably as his own skin. But Miriam was right, it was a disgrace to the eyes; he would not wear it again after tonight. He slid into the driver's seat. Ahead of him that evening was the business dinner in Catania—and then an early bedtime. He would be asleep while the whole island clowned its way toward Holy Week—like small children whistling in the dark, he smiled to himself.

There was only the one appointment. Or so he thought. For if in the hidden pockets of the coat there were odd and sinister small stains, it is most certain they were not known to Mr. Allify. Only to Allah —and perhaps one other.

As he drove toward Catania, he found his spirits rising with the rising hills. The road was empty and he began to sing a little in a high, sweet tenor. Mt. Etna was already visible, a diamond flash of white that scorned the sun's passing. Whatever the sour aftermath, Sicily always offered him this initial headiness, this wild and lordly expansion of body and mind. It was less a geographical spot than a moment in time, a moment to be approached, savored, forgotten.

His left hand moved from the wheel. With clever fingers it sketched the design of the very hills themselves, brought them into being, cast them down into chasmal darkness as he rode beyond them, rode above them; as the dark Jinn once ruled the air while Zeus and Isis slept, unborn. When The Prophet himself was a mere seedling in future time . . .

A Munich winter was strictly for the military and the birds, Mrs. Bromley told her son, and off she flew to Sicily, carrying with her a genuine heart ailment and a small crop of hypochondrias suitable to her status as a widow of fifty. Timidity about traveling alone was no longer one of them, so on the last stage of the journey to Taormina, she looked about with a vague sense of unreality but no perturbation.

She was the only woman, let alone foreigner, in a bus crowded with dark young Sicilians. The bus was creaking precariously along a cliff that dropped sheer to the Mediterranean. It was far past her bedtime and the torrential rain that slashed at the windows made Munich's drizzle mild by comparison.

All these factors should have been upsetting. None of them was. She was too excited by her nearness to Africa and the Middle East. For some reason now shrouded in mystery even to her, she had taken a semester of Arabic in college, one of only three students in the course. To be sure, she conceded, hundreds of Americans studied it nowadays, but at the time it had been considered wildly eccentric of her. Secretly she had agreed—and persisted.

And it *had* been a waste of time.

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After thirty years she remembered not a single word and only a portion of the alphabet.

She rubbed the misted window-pane and tried to look toward Africa. But it would be behind her now, she remembered, and the Middle East far to her right. She sat back, knowing suddenly that Sicily would be as near as she would ever come to either. She was not depressed by that conviction or decision or whatever it was. After all, much of the Byzantine flavor still lingered here. And darker strains from darker antiquities. Just enough strangeness to be palatable and not oppressive.

She was pleased to have settled so firmly the question of further journeying south and east. Africa would simply have to come to her.

The storm blew over, the winter rains began to subside. The island again offered, at least to the tourist, the pleasant caprice of flowers and snowy volcano, endless leisure and the slow seepage of time. Here Jason had washed the Golden Fleece in the fourth sacred river. Here a Christian church rose above the rubbled temple of Isis. And here, below Mrs. Bromley's very windows, the Strait of Messina bore American destroyers as indifferently as its waters had held the fleets of Antony and Octavius, the barques of Aegeus and Theseus. Or was she thinking of Ulysses?

It was all the same in the end, if one merely waited long enough . . .

Her hotel, she had found, was not in Taormina proper, but a mile or so down the mountain. And the inn itself spilled its rambling stories toward the sea. Despite the extra flight of stairs, Mrs. Bromley had taken a suite on the lowest corridor. It gave her a private terrace and radiators nearer the unpredictable furnace. Yet perhaps neither hotel nor suite was a fortunate choice in her present state of health. Stairs and the mildest climbing slopes were fatiguing, and it was small comfort to tell herself that much of that fatigue was mental.

She made casual friendships, to be sure, both among tourists and Sicilians. But for the first time in her life she was more acquiescent than responsive. Invitations meant stairs and walking. It was simpler to be smiling, vague, and evasive.

Carnivale caught her unawares. Even a middle-aged New England widow, it appeared, must show up some evening or other during that pre-Lenten week. Essentially gregarious, Mrs. Bromley acknowledged the fact. Even so, she made no outright promises. Yes, if she felt up to it, she would try to make the Taormina party by nine or ten the last evening. She would positively try . . . and they must all come back to her room for a cognac nightcap.

She meant it consciously, at least.

That last evening finally came and she started dressing. It wasn't exactly hot but the air was humid and still. She had powdered too

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vigorously and the powder was already caking. She washed it off; added fresh lipstick. She thrust the last package of American cigarettes into her pocket regretfully. There wouldn't be any more at the Munich PX price. She looked around vaguely.

And now she knew she was stalling, reluctant to leave the lamplit room. She could have gone an hour ago, with the rest of the guests. Already the unwonted quietness of the hotel was drifting down like the muffling snows of her New Hampshire childhood. Not that the air suggested snow. There wasn't a breath of motion, even from the sea, even from Etna. There was simply a smothery stillness.

She went up the stairs at her careful pace, past long corridors empty of guests or staff, past darkened dining room and kitchens. With some compunction she saw the young porter lounging against the open door of the lobby. She paused and questioned him: she hoped he hadn't been forced to stay here simply because she had not left with the others?

Oh, no, he assured her. His Uncle Vanni would arrive shortly to take over his duties for a time. Uncle Vanni had never been bright enough to learn English or much of anything else—here the boy laughed and tapped his forehead—but he was a good, conscientious old man who obeyed orders. And anyway, the manager himself would be back soon. And others of the staff.

Mrs. Bromley nodded and went past him into the lighted garden. Steps led to the road six feet above, and the very glow of the sunken garden made the thoroughfare dim by contrast. As she looked up, a man trotted by.

It was the only way to describe a gait both rapid and mincing. He was very thin and a long trench coat flapped at his heels—at least, it looked like a trench coat. But at Carnivale time, African or Levantine characters occasionally drifted over to Sicily, wearng their own odd versions of western garb.

The thin little man was muttering to himself and gesticulating violently to an invisible companion. It must have been an absorbing conversation for he looked neither right nor left but hurried on like a rather sinister White Rabbit. (Mrs. Bromley, as befitted her generation, was addicted to Lewis Carroll.)

Not Sicilian, she thought with sudden and violent partisanship. She had yet to see a drunken Sicilian. On the other hand, she admitted, she had yet to see Sicilians during a Carnivale evening. At any rate, she ascended the steps very slowly, giving the sinister little man time to get well ahead of her.

A gaggle of teenagers scurried by, laughing, singing—two boys, three girls. Relieved at this company, she started up the road behind them. As they passed the muttering stranger, he lurched diagonally across the

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road toward them. Seizing hands, they ran past him in a snickering, evading chain. And if there was something of hysteria in the snickers, there was also the scornful confidence of youth and numbers. They were too agile to suit Mrs. Bromley, for in a brief minute or two they had vanished into the darkness.

The muttering man resumed his private conversation, fingers flashing and pointing at the listening air, drawing cryptic, mystic designs.

Mrs. Bromley's walk became a saunter, but her decision was brisk enough: five minutes for a cigarette at the first street light, she nodded to herself. At the rate he's skipping along, he'll be almost in Taormina by then . . .

The parapet by the street light invited the elbows and she lounged against it, enjoying the cigarette, enjoying having the road, the sea, the mountain to herself. In front of her, that mountain plunged to the Mediterranean. A few villas, darkended now, had clawed themselves to the slope, but in general the sparse soil and scrubby brush had been given over to the goats.

Behind her and across the road, narrow vegetable terraces ranged like giant stairs above the remnants of ancient Roman tombs—terraces whose soil had been carried up in baskets. The were invisible now, but the sea was not. It had its own incandescence even on a moonless night, even under a clouded, threatening sky. It was as though it carried its own secret cache of stars beneath the glassy black of its surface.

Of course Mrs. Bromley knew it was actually the phosphoresence of decayed matter, but the small fancy pleased her.

The cigarette was almost finished now. She turned to resume her stroll. And paused. Far ahead at the top of another slope and beneath another street light, the muttering stranger stood. He was too distant for her to see his face but she knew that he had turned and was staring down at her. He too rested against the parapet. Easily. But she had a queer and disconcerting notion: it was as though he had been patiently waiting for a rendezvous arranged long ago and now about to be kept. She could not know if he were still muttering but the restless hands were still.

Her own were not. She was annoyed to feel a tremor go through them. The cigarette slipped from her fingers and she stamped on its last embers.

She was suddenly remembering the girl in Catania, strangled with a nylon stocking, and the even more horrid story of the Palermo prostitute mutilated with the heel of her own shoe . . . during Carnivale.

But they were young women, loose women. It was ridiculous for her to feel nervous. This near to Africa, one was an aged crone at fifty. Still, she wished she hadn't been smoking. Tourists could do

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what they liked, but reputable Sicilian women did not smoke in public.

She told herself, just be calm. Remember that you are foreign and fifty. He'll see that when you're near enough, no matter how intoxicated he is. It will be amusing to see his jaw drop. For the first and probably last time in your life, you can be glad of spreading hips and sagging jawline. Enjoy it, woman. Up and off to Taormina with spring in your toes and dignity in your eye!

It was a fine pep talk but Mrs. Bromley had no real anticipation of amusement as she started resolutely up the slope again.

She had taken only a few steps when something said: *Go back, go back—before it's too late.*

No, she thought perplexedly, that wasn't right. Nothing had been *said*. There was no voice inside her head, let alone outside it. There was only a command. It was as deterring as a hand placed physically against her chest. Yet it wasn't physical, either.

She stopped, bewildered first, then angry.

Mrs. Bromley despised superstition. She sniffed just as contemptuously at those who ventured into the muddy waters of precognition, premonition, telepathy, and the like. The young moderns could call this parapsychology or pioneer exploration. But names and labels didn't confuse Mrs. Bromley. She called the whole business downright retrogression. And worse—a slap in the face to two generations that had tried to bring rationality into a world ruled by slapdash emotions.

Something of this went confusedly through her head as she forced herself to step forward again. But again: the invisible hand, the inaudible voice: *Go back, go back—before it's too late.*

Her heart jolted, set up a fast erratic humming. She listened to that heart, alarmed and then relieved—relieved of any decision.

Surely there is nothing superstitious about obeying the dictates of the body? And her body was speaking in no uncertain terms. Mrs. Bromley listened willingly. Not that she was schizophrenic; but the doctors had warned that she might often be tempted to ignore physical fatigue, so to speak.

Now, in this vast dark night, it was somehow comforting to think of that other entity, the body. It was reacting unhappily. Even the mild slope she had climbed must have been too tiring after the hotel stairs. Moreover, from far away in the east, heat lightning was spitting from the clouds. The air was muggy and oppressive. No wonder she felt this malaise, this confusion of body and mind.

Well, Carnivale would have to close without her. It wouldn't miss her and she wouldn't miss it, she thought with rising spirits. There was an excellent book in her room —and no doubt she would be the only tourist tomorrow who would

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be able to look an apéritif in the eye . . .

A pebble had worked its way into the laces of one oxford, and she paused to remove it. Behind her, another foot crunched on the road, was instantly still. She glanced around. The muttering man was following, must have been following at the same pace or she would have heard him before. Well, there was one sure way to find out. She quickened her saunter to a brisk walk. The other footsteps quickened. She slowed. The echoing footsteps slowed.

Mockingly. Yet a swift backward glance showed that the distance between two walkers had appreciably lessened. I won't panic, Mrs. Bromley told herself disdainfully, and found herself running.

Thank God it was downhill going and she had a head start. For he was running now too, all pretense discarded. And he was thin and agile, not lumpy and breathless. Around this curve it was dark and there wouldn't be another street light until she reached the hotel. If she ever did . . .

A lurid flash of the heat lightning only made the ensuing night press closer. She stumbled to one knee, dropped her cigarettes, groped senselessly, futilely for them . . . was up again, running again. An awkward, middle-aged Atalanta.

There was no sound at all now, except the drumming in her ears, a waterfall roaring more and more loudly. I'll never make it, she thought with sudden, calm despair. My heart is bursting. I might as well have kept up golf and climbed the Capitoline.

Bright lights shattered the night. Somehow she found an incredible last reserve of speed; somehow she found herself racing down the steps into the hotel garden and through the wide-flung doors of the lobby. It was still empty except for a strange and elderly porter at the desk.

Oh, yes, Uncle Vanni! The one who didn't know English and wasn't too bright anyway! She glared at him with as young and fresh an anger as she had ever felt in college when a blind date had proved a miserable gamble.

And he stared back with the same anxious humility.

She gestured at the garden, pantomimed violently that the doors should be closed and bolted—doors far too heavy and rusty for her to move.

Uncle Vanni leaned forward. His vacant gentle smile broadened, eager to show appreciation of her Carnivale gaiety. But he didn't stir, his hand remaining firmly iced to the telephone. Obviously he had his orders. But the lamps, the civilized calm of the lobby itself, gave her confidence to retrace a step or two from the desk, to peer gaspingly back into the night outside.

No one was in sight. The pursuit had ended.

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The muttering man had not dared to follow her through the hotel garden. So whatever the degree of his drunkenness or derangement, some animal caution had been operating too. If it had been merely a Carnivale whim . . . but she really wasn't thinking too clearly. Already she was tearing down the two flights to her room.

She bolted the door, then hurried to the open French windows that gave on the terrace. Far across the Strait of Messina, two cloud columns smote each other in a silent flash of lightning, but the sea below her was calm and there was no rain. The last night of Carnivale in Sicily would not be spoiled. She fastened screens and windows, then peered into the bathroom. No problem there: only the door to her room and a very high small window.

Now, at last, she obediently took a nitroglycerin tablet. She didn't really need it, she thought with mild surprise. There was no pain and her heart had steadied, though no doubt she'd have lame muscles tomorrow. She hadn't done any running for years. She had to admit that Uncle Vanni had given her an immense shot of confidence. He was no use at all—but he was a man. Dear good conscientious Uncle Vanni! Years hence, perhaps, someone would lift his feet from the floor, pry his hand from the telephone, open and shut his jaw, like a puppet-master, so that he could make intelligible sounds.

For the first time she had an opportunity to consider the waiting friends, the unkept promises. There on the desk, for instance, was the long-necked, potbellied cognac bottle whose contents she had expected to serve to her friends as a nightcap. As it was, she would be asleep when they returned. It would be a nice gesture to toast them—but too much trouble, since the bottle was unopened. Besides, her nightly glass of milk would be coming shortly.

Instead, she lit an Italian cigarette, grimaced at the first puff, waved it aloft. "Here's to you, my dears, and to Carnivale," she said aloud and then settled into the easy chair with the excellent book.

But she didn't start reading immediately. Now that she was comfortable, she was trying to recall her recent emotions: that silly flight back to the hotel, the even sillier panic, and her nonsensical feeling of premonition. But even the memory of those emotions was already evading her, like a vivid dream that shreds away as soon as one tries to pin it down.

It wasn't a story she would care to repeat to many people, she acknowledged regretfully. Too much the stereotype of the aging spinster or widow who sees a man under every bed . . . In fact, it wasn't a story at all, merely an experience with an emotional force that was disproportionate to the facts. All heat lightning and no storm.

Yet there had been the reverbera-

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tion of a storm, there had been a moment of horror such as she had never known before. There had been what the superstitious would call a "warning." But before her comfortable rationality could be further disturbed, Lewis Carroll galloped to the rescue and she remembered those delightful, those utterly sane lines from—was it *Through the Looking-Glass?*

"That moment of horror," the King said, "I shall never never forget!"

"You will though," said the queen, "if you don't make a memorandum of it."

Mrs. Bromley smiled to herself, dozed a little, waked again. The book no longer appealed. Instead of reading, she would write her son and preserve the small apt jest. Already in the corridor were the light footsteps of the floor maid, returning to take up the night's routine.

Mrs. Bromley pulled the bell-rope, signaling for her glass of milk. And unlocked the door. Finally she could settle to her desk, drawing the lamp closer, pushing the cognac bottle farther from her writing hand.

She wrote rapidly. In Calabria, Greece, and farther east in Cyprus it had started to rain furiously. But here the evening air merely pressed soft, ineffectual palms against the closed windows. She recounted her little adventure lightly, wittily, making fun of her "premonition" for the sheer pleasure of capping it with the quotation from Lewis Carroll. She nibbled her pen and was about to add her signature. Then she remembered her son's question.

"No," she wrote, "I'm not going to Africa or the Middle East, even though Algiers is only a two-hour flight from Palermo. It's just thirty years too late. Doubt if I'd understand a single Arabic phrase if my life depended on it."

There was a light tap and the door opened. The milk. "Right here, please," Mrs. Bromley murmured absently as she fumbled behind the cognac bottle for an envelope.

Then the hand came into sight—as though it had materialized from the shadows. Disembodied, palm down, it lay quietly under the lamplight, lay on the desk.

It was a long, beautiful, male hand, gray jade with almond nails. And for all its stillness, there was something vibrantly alive and menacing about it.

It was a hand out of the Arabian nights, the hand of the sad Jinn springing from the eternal, ominous bottle. And like the Jinn, it held the childish wish: the red package of American cigarettes, those she had dropped on the road.

Mrs. Bromley did not even trouble to look up. So the appointment was to be kept, after all . . . She felt nothing except a last wild flash of amazed insight. The inaudible voice on the road had spoken to her in *Arabic—and she had understood.* She still understood!

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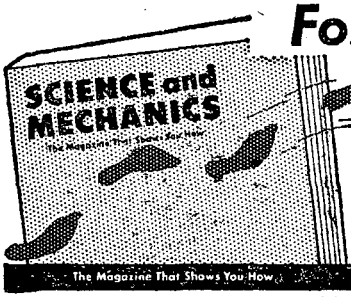
If she made any sound at all, it was only a very small, resigned sigh.

The inquest was over and certain of Mrs. Bromley's effects had been returned, including that last letter. Her son sat at her desk, reading it for the third time. Then he looked at the desk top itself.

The cognac bottle and cigarette package were in the police museum, but the wood was still faintly chalk-marked: a rectangle for the cigarettes, a circle for the bottle. The scattered envelopes still nudged the circle.

Without thinking, he spoke aloud. "Good thing your hand was practically on the bottle, Mother. Must have been as easy as swinging a ten-pin—" He bit off the words abruptly. But Mrs. Bromley was asleep and only a gentle snore answered him.

He eyed his mother with affection —and some uneasiness. He was glad she had been so alert, but he couldn't help feeling that Madam Allify's quiet retirement to a convent was somehow more suitable than his mother's suddenly renewed interest in people and social gaiety. Not that he wanted her to go into a convent. He did wish she were not quite so—impervious.



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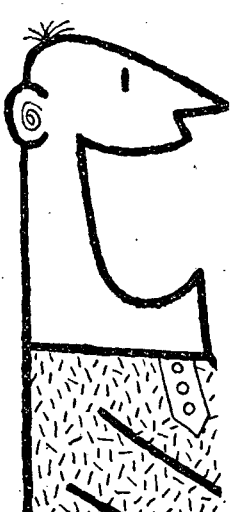

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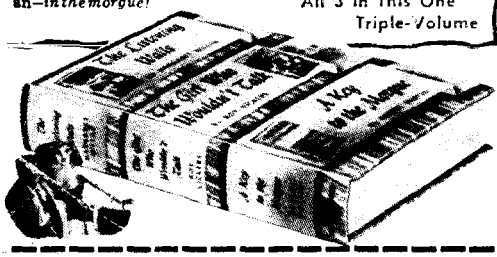

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